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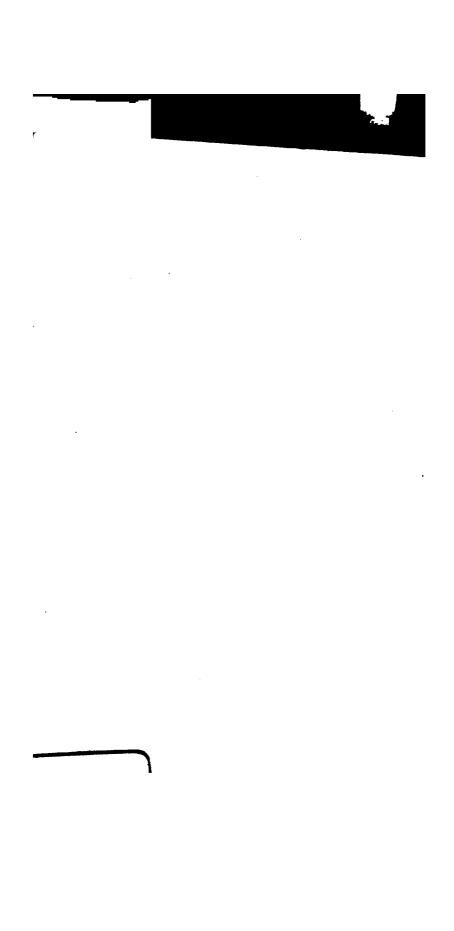
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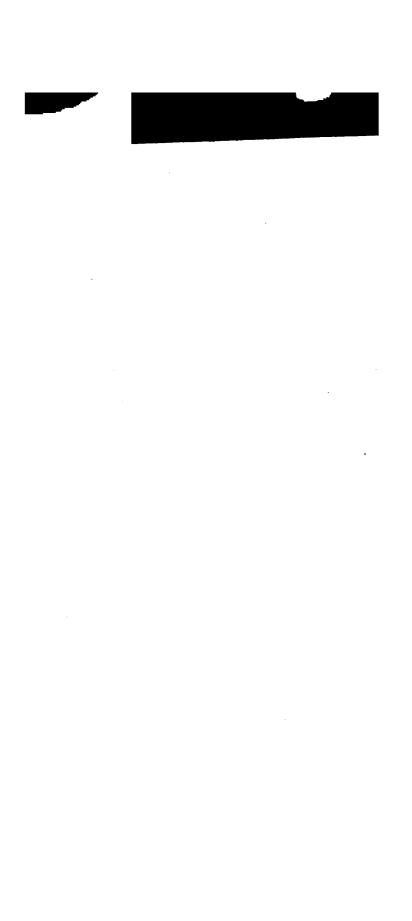




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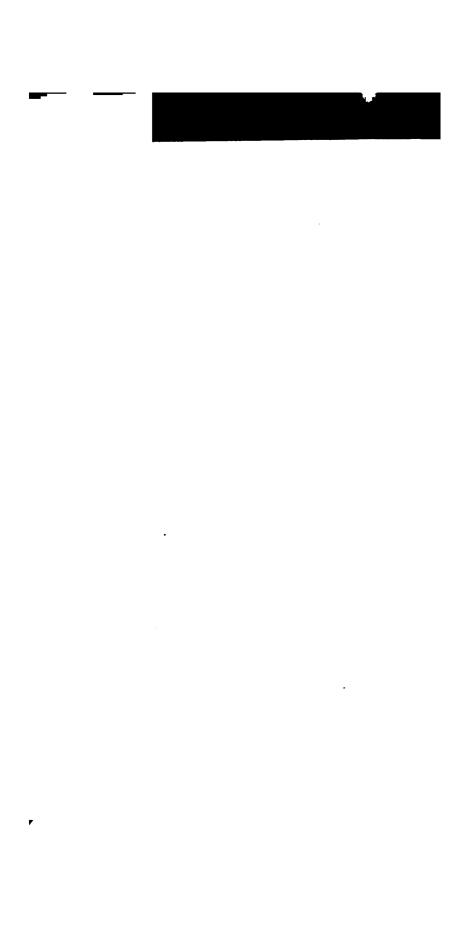
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THE HERITAGE OF EVE





# THE HERITAGE OF EVE

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H. H. SPETTIGUE



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# THE HERITAGE OF EVE

# CHAPTER I.

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#### LOVE OR ART?

'To some she is the goddess great;
To some the milch cow of the field:
Their care is but to calculate
What butter she will yield.'

SCHILLER.

About the middle of this rapidly-dying century an important discovery of tin was made on a piece of moorland lying between the Cornish mining town of Camryn and the fishing village of Penborne. Colossal fortunes had been made in connection with Cornish tin-mining, and a party of eager adventurers soon bought up mineral and all other rights necessary to make the speculation a 'going concern.' Captain Obadiah Johns, the mining luminary, surveyed the property, and pronounced favourably on the prospects of the undertaking.

On this verdict, as if by magic, appeared an army of those who, being rich, wanted to be richer, or, being poor, wanted to be rich. The wilderness, which before had been given up to the noxious henbane and weird horned poppy, was soon covered with rough cottages and the hideous

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structures which spring up above the honeycombing of the miner.

In this general immigration arrived a German engineer named Storck, who hoped to find here employment for his talents, as well as leisure to pursue his study of Shakespeare, the one passion, so far, of his life. He was free from the thirst of gain which actuated those around him, and while the Williamses and Carlyons and other hardened speculators were lining their nests, he made small progress towards the competence and leisure which it was his desire to gain. However, he made friends among the more fortunate adventurers, and in the sister of one of them, Miss Jennifer Williams, he found the object of his second passion. Miss Williams' father, a typical country doctor, now old and apoplectic, did not smile upon the suit. Late in life, and through no exertions of his own, he had seen his sons placed in positions which promised considerable influence in the county, and he was by no means disposed to bestow his only daughter on a penniless foreign adventurer. The course of true love, however, was smoothed in this case by an elder brother of Miss Williams, a middle-aged man with no particular interests in life, who had made a romantic marriage himself, having, while still a struggling medical student, won the heart of Margery Carlyon, daughter and heiress of the favourite of fortune who absolutely owned the celebrated South Pond property. The world, that part of it which lay within ten miles of Penborne and Camryn. prophesied that Mr. George Williams would pay dearly for his intervention on the lovers' behalf; but when the bride was won Herr Storck peremptorily forbade any interference in her affairs by her family, preferring the bread and water of liberty to the richer fare of dependence.

Matters went well for the East Wheal Jemima Ann for some years after the engineer's marriage, and he began to think seriously of retiring on his means and producing the treatise on 'Shakespeare's Influence on English Literature,' which was to be the crown of his life. But Providence had sent him four daughters to be provided for, and this fact kept him at the wheel, for Dr. Williams had never forgiven the misalliance, and at his death made no provision for his daughter, beyond bequeathing to her the picturesque old house in which he had lived.

To keep his mind steadily fixed on his favourite topic, Herr Storck bestowed on the international infants the names of Shakespeare's heroines, Miranda, Bianca, Olivia, and Titania. Notwithstanding his peculiarities, the German was a very tender-hearted father. The wife of Professor Arthur, at that time living at Camryn, relates how she was once riding along the country lanes with her husband in the very early spring, when they saw the much-talked-of engineer approaching. 'Now you can introduce me to the man of mind!' she exclaimed. Herr Storck, a small and inconspicuous-looking man, beamed a cordial welcome and raised his hat-a high one, such as every man wore at that time—with the foreigner's liberal politeness. In doing so he covered himself with a veritable shower of primroses. He gathered them up carefully, explaining that he had found them on a sunny bank, and was taking them home to the children, who would be delighted to have them so early in the season. On Mrs. Arthur's hint, he pinned his handkerchief round the lining of his hat, and rode off complacently, while she turned away, laughingly declaring that the only suggestion of mind was the absence of it.

It was a great grief to the German philosopher that his children were all girls. He craved for a son to inherit his tastes, profit by his researches, and make a grand figure in European literature. Woman's intellect he held in rather low estimation. In his difficulty he threw his ægis over a certain waif of the Carlyon family, an orphan boy whose father had been associated with him in the East Wheal

Jemima Ann, where he had speedily won a considerable fortune, which, however, was even more speedily dissipated in kindred enterprises. That he might wrestle well, and overcome more than his enemies, his ambitious godfather selected the name of Orlando for the destined student. would gladly have adopted his protégé but for two reasons. One was that Orlando's Aunt Margery, from what she called a 'high sense of duty,' thought fit to bury family feuds and see after her ne'er-do-well brother's son herself. The other was sadder still, namely, that in spite of his beautifully appropriate name, his training from the cradle, and all the influences which could be brought to bear on him, Orlando showed a distinct preference for blowing birds' eggs, flying kites, sailing boats, even winding worsted yarn or beating batter-any amusement or occupation, in short, rather than apply his youthful mind to Shakespearian study; and it was an incontrovertible fact that his play-fellow, Titania, though she belonged to the weaker sex, displayed more appreciation of and aptitude in the pursuit of knowledge.

The German's disappointment was short, however, for there occurred at the East Wheal Jemima Ann one of those terrible disasters which again and again paralyze mining industries. No one could ever tell the cause of the calamity, those who only could have thrown any light on the subject having fallen its victims. When all seemed going on as usual, an explosion took place, killing instantaneously the engineer and three workmen employed in the engine-house. It was no doubt a coincidence, but from the day of the fatal accident nothing went well at the mine. The ore deteriorated, the vein ran differently from what had been expected, and depression fell on the spirits of both capitalists and miners. The army of workers vanished, and in two years' time the moor was once more given up to henbane and poppy. Coarse spire grass fringed the edges of the

shafts, moss grew over the hurdles around them, and the cottage walls fell down. Desolation reigned supreme again.

The Storck family would probably have joined in the general exodus, but the scantiness of their means compelled them to live where the means of living were cheap, and Mrs. Storck dreaded leaving her own people.

Aunt Margery insisted on defraying all educational expenses, which relieved the widow of her heaviest burden.

- 'The girls are worth fifty of Orlando,' the old lady remarked when matters came to be discussed; 'and I say it, though he is my own flesh and blood.'
- 'There is no need to draw comparisons,' said her sisterin-law, who resented with as much warmth as her gentle nature would allow any imputation on Orlando.
- 'That may be so, but I suppose I may think what I like. I hope I shall do my duty by all parties.'

Nobody knew what Aunt Margery's means were, but she selected a very expensive school for her nieces, and started Orlando in what she considered a corresponding manner. Had it not been for Mrs. Storck's motherly love and the kindness of the girls, Orlando's holidays, first from school, and then from Peters' Mercantile Marine Inquiry Office, would have been 'dark days' indeed. He did not in the least resent his aunt's preference for her husband's relations—it was his misfortune, not their fault.

- 'It would alter the case if she really made one of the Storck girls an heiress,' some people remarked.
- 'Orlando would probably find some means to cut that Gordian knot,' others replied.

Before Mrs. Williams condescended to enliven the district with any solution of this problem, the Storck family rose into prominence by another sensation. Miranda married Mr. Pennant, the young and handsome owner of Pengeagle Hall and the fertile lands comprising the parish of St. Petifer the Less, an oasis bordered on the north by

the deserted moorland, and stretching past the commons of Penborne to the sunny valley which ended in the little seaport of Eyelets. Left an orphan as a child, with no near friends to be interested in him, he had grown up in a kind of glorified isolation, which was a pillar of cloud to him, closing round him again and again, when he returned from school and college to his lonely home. It was natural he should lightly estimate his advantages of position and birth, and little to be wondered at that he should fall deeply in love with the beautiful and charming daughter of his kind neighbour Mrs. Storck.

'What a mother!' said the world. 'You may depend upon it, those quiet, good-tempered people are always the deepest.'

The world looked to see what other game this clever huntress would bring down, but year by year went by and neither of the others followed Mirry's brilliant example. Indeed, Mirry made no attempt at reigning as queen in society. She was as good-natured as ever, gave her surplus fruit and flowers to the poor, organized concerts for any necessitous charity, and asked the most humdrum people to stand sponsors to her children. Altogether the affair was anomalous.

The world decided that Bianca, Olivia, and Tita would not marry until Aunt Margery left them her money.

One autumn day, after a sharp attack of bronchitis and a partial recovery,

'My good old lady catch'd a cold, and died.'

Everybody was intensely surprised to find that so arbitrary and eccentric a woman had left every penny of her fortune to her husband, absolutely and unconditionally.

'It will be a sad blow to Orlando,' said Mrs. Lawrence, the wife of the overworked doctor, to her friend Mrs. Tangert, the wife of the underworked lawyer. 'As for the poor Storck girls, money may come too late for them.

### LOVE OR ART?

Bianca and Olivia are getting old-maidish, and Tita quite strong-minded.'

Strong-minded, in its accepted significance, was certainly a harsh word to use about the subject of this biography. Tita Storck; but her best friends would not have claimed for her exemption from a certain severity of judgment, which was due much more to her principles than to her prejudices. She was clever, but had seen nothing of the world; she was twenty-four, and yet had known nothing Her face was still a perfect mirror of her mind. There were no wrinkles on her forehead, no lines around her mouth. Her gray eyes had a perfectly neutral expression, and her mouth was generally firmly closed over her small teeth. In describing her, strangers generally used the word 'intelligent' instead of 'clever' about her expression. This was owing to the fact that there was something childish about her face and figure. She was rather less than the middle height, but looked a little taller than she was, being slight, and having singularly long arms and small hands and feet. Her hair was yellow, turned perfectly smoothly off her forehead and braided, be the fashion what it might, at the back of her head. She spoke with a slight inequality of voice, which no one would have dreamt of calling either a stammer or a lisp, and yet partook in the least possible degree of both.

Of the other two girls all that need now be said is that Bianca was vivacious and Olivia shrewd. They were all three rather weary of Penborne and its ways.

'I wish Mirry would take a little more trouble to make things pleasant for us,' exclaimed Olivia one day, after they had settled down again into the old grooves, from which they had been temporarily roused by the excitement of their aunt's illness and death. 'If Mirry had managed well when she was married, I don't doubt she might have known the Saint Aubyns and Trelawneys, and gone everywhere. In-

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stead of which she knows nobody and goes nowhere. I really hardly see the use of having a sister well married, unless she makes an effort to help on the younger ones.'

- 'I do hope there is some way of getting through life without marrying,' said Bianca in reply. 'I think Mirry troubles herself quite enough about it as it is. She said the other day she had misgivings as to whether she was doing her duty by us. "But then," she said, "something is sure to happen if it is meant to. Bianca will never marry"—and I am sure I don't want to—"and there is Mr. Fotheringay for Olivia—if Providence means them for one another, somebody will leave him some money or something—and if Tita doesn't marry Orlando she won't marry at all. I don't see what I can do."
- 'How like Mirry!' exclaimed Olivia. 'Are we to spend our lives waiting for something to happen? What are you going to do, Tita?'
- 'I mean to be a great writer,' said Tita promptly; but down in her heart she was singing, 'Love and Art are both before me!'
- 'I don't wish to be discouraging, but it seems to me we have heard that tale before.'
- 'Well, I am sure I have written enough! But I mean to succeed some day.'
- 'If you had only let Mr. Fowler put "As Frank as Fair" into his magazine, I dare say you would have received a few pounds for it.'
  - 'I don't call that success,' said Tita contemptuously.
- 'One must begin somewhere, and you need not despise availing yourself of a helping hand. The fire will try your work after that.'
- 'But you have written stories and had them accepted by the first editor to whom you sent them, without any patronage. Why should I lick the dust?'
  - 'Because while I write what there is a demand for, you

write what is worth writing. I have no literary taste and no literary talent; but I know what style of writing will be accepted by the second-rate magazines to which I am content to send my productions when I want an extra bonnet. I shall have used up my lords and ladies and garden-parties and sprained ankles before long, and then I shall have nothing left. No critic ever mentions my stories, no publisher proposes that I shall write a novel. I am mediocre, and know it.'

- 'I would not commit my mediocrity to the world if I could.'
- 'Never fear! you cannot be mediocre. You are too intensely conscious of the meaning of life; you try to keep touch with the undercurrent of thoughts and feelings; you must be earnest, real. I remember hearing you say one still summer day that you could hear the world's heart beat. It was half the conviction of the philosopher and half the fancy of the child. Some day you will grow out of your crudity, and then you will find that you are successful.'
- 'Before I have founded my school I have a devoted disciple. I wonder bolstering me up in a belief in myself does not wear you out. Sometimes I think it must be a superhuman effort. I write poetry to fill some editor's waste-paper basket; I write essays, they are returned with thanks; I write stories, their fiction department is full; I write novels, "They are well written, but would not pay"; and still you say, "You will succeed"!
- 'Remember Cowper did not write till middle age, and many of the successful writers who did begin young must have wished they had suppressed their "tu-whit, tu-whoo."
- 'But Longfellow, Chatterton, Kirke White, Byron—they all did well in their youth.'
- 'I shall only grant you Longfellow. Chatterton's life seems to me more valuable from an artistic point of view, for its tragedy than for anything he produced. Kirke

White would probably never have written at all had he not been consumptive; and you might never have heard of Byron but for the Scotch reviewers.'

- 'Am I to range myself with Longfellow, or poison myself, or go off in a consumption, or get laughed at by the critics, to achieve fame?'
- 'Neither. Wait till Uncle George leaves you his money, and then see something of the world.'
- 'Do you think he has very much money? and do you think he will leave it to me?'

Bianca, who through the literary discussion had maintained a dignified indifference, looked up with astonishment at hearing such cold-blooded questions fall from Tita, who since Mrs. Williams' death had been a most devoted nurse to the ailing widower.

- 'The Carlyons made heaps of money out of the mines,' said Olivia. 'Perhaps fifty thousand pounds.'
  - 'That would make an heiress of me,' said Tita slowly.
- 'I don't think it is fair of you to count on it like that,' said Bianca sharply.
- 'She is Uncle George's favourite, and was Aunt Margery's. I think that gives her a sort of right to it,' said Olivia.
- 'I don't think so,' said Tita seriously. 'Remember, there are other Williamses, and Orlando, to whom the Carlyons' money certainly should go.'
  - 'Aunt Margery never meant that,' said Olivia.
- 'What she meant makes no difference to the justice of the case.'
- 'I don't agree with you there,' said Bianca; 'but I think uncle will leave his money—which I dare say is not half what people say—equally between the Camryn Williamses, Orlando, and ourselves.'
- 'That would leave Tita free to publish at her own cost, if she could get a publisher to do it for her.'

- 'But I should not be an heiress?' hazarded Tita.
- 'You are horribly mercenary,' said Bianca.
- 'Perhaps I am,' said Tita; 'but I don't think it would do for me to trust to my "goddess great" to provide me with the necessaries of life.'
- 'Your "goddess great" might get on a little better in this world if she were a rather more humble-minded damsel.'
- 'She shall never stoop to conquer,' retorted Tita. 'I will write on till I produce something worth publishing for its own sake, or I will be "mute inglorious." My greatest trouble is that I cannot always hear the world's heart-throbs; I cannot even keep control over the workings of my brain. There comes some interruption, and my ideas disperse like the snowflakes before the December blast.'
- 'Keep your magnificent similes for your next romance,' said Bianca sarcastically.
- 'You may be ironical if you like,' said Tita patiently; but it is as trying for me to have my ideas dispersed as if I were capable of writing "Kubla Khan":

"All the charm
Is broken—all the phantom-world so fair
Vanishes."

Say I am writing, "So Sir Guy, hearing a piercing shriek in the distance, spurs his fiery courser to the fray," when the door opens, and Selina says: "Any mack'rel wanted, please, miss?" Do you suppose I can gallop straight on to the rescue?'

- 'I don't see that it would matter much if you couldn't,' said Bianca dryly.
- 'Habit will help you to conquer the distraction which interruptions cause you,' said Olivia.
- 'I have another source of distraction,' said Tita, with one of her infrequent smiles. 'When I am lost in "maiden meditation," some velvet step will pass me, and a lowered

voice will say, "Hush! don't disturb Titania." Then I want to rush away and become part of the elements.'

'Would you rather mother hammered about the house as Aunt Margery used to do?' asked Bianca, with the ready aptitude for taking up the cudgels in behalf of the absent which comes naturally to those whose instincts prompt them to belabour the present.

'No; it is something in myself, and cannot be helped,' said Tita, who, knowing Bianca's real good nature, never became irritated under her sarcasms, but rather enjoyed her quips and cranks, as some people like snuff or cayenne pepper.

'Rubbish!' said Bianca. 'Why don't you write straight away, like Mr. William Black, and not go so deep that you get stuck in the mud at every turn?'

""Away up among the lochs a canoe was drifting idly upon the rising tide. Its owner, Johnnie Callendar, who should by this time have been on the return voyage to his night's resting-place, was lying at full length on his back in the heather on the bank above the creek. The purple-green sky gradually darkened to a black red-blue, studded with eyes of lambent flame. The moon crept up in the east, like a cycle of phosphorus paint. The dew stole softly down. Presently the shrill cry of a curlew roused the young man from his reverie, and, starting up, he displayed the outlines of a son of Anak against the sky. He hurried down to the creek, but there was no sign of his canoe. With a sigh he resigned it to its fate, with its cargo of sandwiches and soda-water, and turned inland to make his way across the dreary marshes. Clouds dashed rapidly past the moon; the wind was getting up. No pathway was to be descried, and he had to make his way guided entirely by the position of the stars, which were fast being obscured by the rising tempest. Splash, splash, through dark pools, now above his ankle, now above his knee. Now he had to plough his way through beds of iris, whose spiky leaves looked like bayonet-points in the uncertain light; now through tangled masses of heather, which clung about his feet like matted sponge. At last the rain began to fall, and, drenched from head to foot, he could barely struggle forward towards a lambent flash of colour which had appeared in the distance. Was it a Will-o'-the-Wisp or a light from a farm lantern?"' Tita paused a moment in mischievous silence. 'There!' she exclaimed; 'confess I can tell a straight-away story if I choose.'

- 'Mr. Black would never get his hero into such positive discomfort as that,' objected Olivia. 'He sees the necessity of pain, but his muse is a comfortable dame.'
  - 'Ted Ives in "Kilmeny" walks without shoes,' said Tita.
  - 'That was from choice,' said Olivia.
- 'Any way, Johnnie Callendar's adventures promised to be a good deal more interesting than what you generally write,' said Bianca.
- 'I don't think you know much about that,' said Olivia.
  'I don't suppose you ever read ten pages of what Tita has written.'
- 'Oh yes, I have! I remember reading a poem called "The Martyr," in which heretic was spelt with two "r's" and a "k."
- 'I remember it, too. Tita was ten when she wrote that, and it proved that she could feel if she could not spell,' said Olivia loyally. 'The idea was nearly the same as that in the "Miracle of the Roses," but Tita saw other forms in the fire:

"Ye demons!

Though ye hide in crowds amid the sparkling flames,
And laugh and mock the living God.

And laugh and mock the living God, See ye not the hosts of angels crowding In the white smoke?"

I think that is not to be despised as the effort of a child of ten, though how a child of ten could voluntarily keep such a vision of horror before her eyes for three pages of closelywritten verse I cannot imagine. She realized what she was writing, too, for do you remember she says:

"See the pearl drops on his brow! His crown they are"?"

'I don't remember those lines, but I remember she calls the priest who invites the "herretick" to recant "the devil's son," which seems to me rather narrow-minded, and I think the whole piece was suggested by Southey's "Miracle of the Roses." The line

"And praying, a soft cloudy hand sealed his lips for ever" sounds suspiciously familiar.

'Ah, you can remember a line when you choose!' exclaimed Olivia, somewhat sharply; 'but that idea, at any rate, cannot come from Southey. And none of it does, either,' she continued, warming beyond the consideration of grammar, 'for she could not have read the "Miracle of the Roses" before "The Martyr" was written, for we had no copy of Southey's works, and Tita's first acquaintance with it was made at school, when she found it in the "Thousand and One Gems."'

"" Why don't you speak for yourself, John?" 'said Bianca, turning to Tita.

'Because I don't think it is worth it,' said Tita quietly.

But in reality she vastly enjoyed this stir about her poor little poem, and in this susceptibility you had the vulnerable heel of this little adamantine Sappho. Olivia knew that she required this flattering unction to her soul, and her extraordinary belief in her younger sister's ability never allowed her to stint it.

Had it not been for this, the world might never have heard the name of Tita Storck.

#### CHAPTER II.

#### LITERARY SHARKS.

'It is therefore vanity to seek after perishing riches. It is also vanity to seek honours.'—Thomas  $\lambda$  Kempis.

Penborne society, as defined by Olivia, consisted of the Tangerts and Lawrences; Uncle George; Mrs. Tyrwhit, widow of the late vicar; Mrs. Storck; six spinsters of varying ages and circumstances; and Mrs. Peters, a recent recruit, to whom the door had been opened on account of the success and benevolence of her son, who, having left his native village a cabin-boy and worked his way up the rough ladder of life, found himself at fifty one of the largest ship-owners in the kingdom, able and willing to lend a helping hand to many a struggling Cornishman.

The Rev. Septimus Randolph and his daughter classed themselves with the county families, and as there were no county families within walking distance, they postponed their visiting till circumstances should be more favourable. The Pennants lived two miles out of the village, and, strictly speaking, did not belong to any society at all, and were quite content to devote themselves to their children and the home farm. For the first year or two of their married life they had been visited during the autumn by college friends of Mr. Pennant's; but these had gradually dropped off, and now they could only count on the first of September bringing them Mr. Fotheringay, a clever though as yet

briefless barrister, who we know, failing other more eligible suitors, was destined to rescue Olivia from the Moated Grange.

With such surroundings had the Storck family grown up. For years they had been beating their wings against the cage. Bianca wanted to travel, Olivia wanted to get into society, and Tita wanted to earn her place in the equally imaginary paradise she called the literary world. Being poor, Bianca and Olivia had to lay their ambitions aside. Tita alone was able to work for her end. She had the instinct of production, and between the ages of ten and twenty she had written without much definite purpose, except to rid her mind of the formations that gathered in it; then, having a goodly store of essays and stories, and perhaps influenced by the perpetual adulation of Olivia, she set about getting her work before the world. She was by no means sure that she had attained the meridian of her capabilities, but she thought there could be no harm in trying to get papers into the magazines. Had she had any experienced friends, they would have told her to write as much as she pleased, regarding her work as an exercise in composition; but she had none, and since she read some very poor stuff in even the first-class periodicals which came in her way, she inferred that the supply of even moderate-rate writing could not be equal to the demand. The reasoning of a tyro! Had she thought the matter out, she would have guessed that the literature of the best magazines is supplied by two classes of writers—the well-known ones, who are practically paid for their reputation and not their work, and the unknown ones, who are titled dabblers, or friends of the editor. Under this system it may seem strange that so much good work gets out at all. But the well-known authors are artists, and the bulk of their work is of real value, though Homer sometimes nods, and it would not be hard to put one's finger on some very nodding performances, written not because the

writers had an impulse to write or anything to say, but—for some other reason. As for the aristocratic dabblers, the public likes to hear of holidays spent in the Norwegian fiords or among the kopies of Mashonaland, and of well-bred dogs that swallow skewers and are none the worse for it. editor's friends are sometimes very promising writers. a publisher belongs the honour of discovering ' John Inglesant.' A publisher bravely stood up for 'Lorna Doone'surely one of the richest books which ever struggled through years of neglect to a permanent fame, though, in parenthesis, this example would have been worth more if nineteen publishers had not rejected it before! But how are most literary careers begun? It is not given to many to wake up one morning to find themselves famous. Endless disappointments and vexations await the writer, and after the ecstasy of finding himself in print, and of being compared by the critics to Thackeray or Dickens, he gradually awakens to the sad fact that he is still ten miles or so from paradise, and before he gets thus far on his thorny way he will have had to encounter rebuffs and misunderstandings enough to dissuade a literary Hercules. This initiatory fire has its value, doubtless, but suppose Charlotte Brontë had given up literature when she had sent the 'Professor' to six publishers? Suppose Dr. Conan Doyle had buried his 'homing pigeons' and his pen with them? Suppose Hugh Conway had accepted his publisher's verdict on 'Called Back'? One sickens at such possibilities, and sees in a vision the literature of a country represented by Lord Lyttons and Mr. Disraelis.

Our heroine, who began by imagining that some editor would be glad to accept her youthful effusions, soon discovered the sad truth. All her efforts were as arrows aimed at the Pyrrhic phalanx. Nobody wanted her essays, nobody had room for her stories. Disappointed, but not discouraged, she thought she must fly her arrows a little lower.

The only difference in the result was that she received back her manuscripts without a wrapper, and with a printed form instead of a letter. This was humiliating for a writer who had heard for years that she was capable of as good work as some that appeared above distinguished signatures in the best magazines. However, she had a certain amount of common-sense, and soon clipped the wings of her Pegasus.

At this juncture Olivia, having shaken hands with a live earl, thought herself entitled to portray high life, and sent two or three short stories to the Domestic Messenger, and had the satisfaction of finding her 'milch cow' yield her some very golden butter. She had met the earl-who was a philanthropist—and several other public characters at the house of a prominent London clergyman, the Rev. Darcie Cartwright, the father of a school-fellow friend. Among the other people she met there was a Mr. Fowler, the editor of Macintosh's, a magazine of a very superior order to the Domestic Messenger. Hearing that she wrote short stories, he asked her if she would care to send him one for his magazine. Olivia, who had a very just opinion of her own literary talents, confessed that she was sure she could not do anything good enough for Macintosh's, but she wished Mr. Fowler would look over some of her sister's writings, who was very clever, but a little unpractical. Mr. Fowler good-naturedly transferred his offer; but when Olivia returned to Cornwall she found Tita more determined than of old to let her performances stand or fall on their own merits. Patronage she would have nothing to do with. Twice besides were similar openings offered to her and declined with equal decision. Then even Olivia decided that she must win her spurs her own way.

At this time there appeared in the advertisement columns of the daily papers an announcement to the effect that manuscript essays, poetry, and fiction were wanted by the Up and Doing Publishing Company. Particulars would be sent on application at the offices of the company, 5, Holly Bush Road, Gosling Green. Tita wrote making inquiries, and received by the following post a prospectus informing her that the said Publishing Company was about to increase its capital, and hand over its business to a board of directors. Subscription to the additional capital was invited, and attention drawn to the flourishing condition of the company, which had just declared at its third annual meeting a dividend at the rate of 6 per cent.

'The company,' it was explained, 'will continue the publication of the *Up and Doing* and *Clapham-super-Mare* magazines upon the same principles as they have hitherto been conducted, but on an extended scale. From the degree of success attained by the numbers of the magazines already issued, the directors believe that by extending the plan so as to keep the publishing arrangements entirely under their control, and by combining on the direction the needful experience, they will have a field for profitable operations superior to any other, and be made a financial as well as a literary success.'

A critical reader might require to be told how the directors hoped by extending the plan (a nice word 'plan,' usefully indefinite, and you have only to add a 't' to make it in this case strictly accurate) to keep the publishing arrangements entirely under their control. If a facetious character, he might also remark that he would rather have a promise of the shareholders, instead of the directors, being made 'a financial as well as a literary success.'

But Tita was not critical, and the professed object, or 'plan,' of the company seemed to her a good one.

'No existing magazine,' continued the prospectus, 'offers special advantages to Amateur Authors, or, however talented they may be, places them on an equal footing with professional writers; but *Up and Doing* and *Clapham-super-*

Mare will contain the productions of non-professional writers only, and in the selection of articles for insertion, preference will be given to contributions forwarded by shareholders.'

The Up and Doing Publishing Company offered another advantage besides capital letters to amateur authors and non-professional writers, which was not mentioned in the printed prospectus, but in a separate letter, and that was a twelve months' supply of the magazines, to be paid for in advance, which entitled the subscriber to the chance of having his articles accepted by the editor. It is marvellous that such an advertisement and proposal could be attractive to the most simple-minded. But very similar ones appear to this day, and doubtless 'draw.'

Tita forwarded three pounds, the savings from her scanty allowance, and was enrolled a member of the company. She also sent on her subscription for the Up and Doing Magazine, and forwarded to the editor the manuscript of a novel. She received three or four numbers of the magazine, and then the Up and Doing Publishing Company apparently got into difficulties. She received no more copies of the literary success, the Up and Doing, but that was the less to be regretted as-for the credit of professional writers, be it said-it was rubbish from beginning to end. She received no answers to her inquiries as to what had become of the company and its assets, or the magazine and her manuscript, and at the time she was declaring her unaltered determination to write and succeed, she had nearly forgotten the whole business. In fact, her literary endeavours had rather 'gone quiet' after the subsidence of the amateur publishing company. However, as if in answer to her returning enthusiasm, a few days after her conversation with Olivia, the post brought the following letter from the long-silent secretary:

"UP AND DOING" PUBLISHING COMPANY,
'HOLLY BUSH ROAD, GOSLING GREEN.

# 'DEAR MADAM,

'We have had by us for some time past a very interesting manuscript entitled 'Potmarjoram,' and of which our reader gives us a very favourable opinion. We are not prepared to purchase further manuscripts at present, or, indeed, for some time to come; but we are willing to join you in the expense of publishing, upon the proceeds of all sales being equally divided. We estimate the cost of production at about £60, we should therefore require you to advance towards that the sum of £30—payable £10 down, and £20 upon the completion of the printing. The work would be produced as an ordinary one volume novel, to sell at 10s. 6d. per copy retail, and we should produce as many copies as were required for sale up to 2,000. Account of sales and cheque for your proportion would be remitted quarterly.

'We are advised that the work is likely to prove successful, and that it would repay for production upon the above terms.

'Yours faithfully,

' MARMADUKE MANDEVILLE,

' Secretary.'

The proposal had every appearance of being a fair one, but Tita was aware that she would have absolutely no check on a dishonest publisher, for what was the use of trusting to accounts which could be cooked at will? If Marmaduke Mandeville chose to say he had sold 50 copies when he had sold 200, what proof could she bring against him? It did not escape her notice that the *Up and Doing* Publishing Company always 'required you to advance,' whether it was as shareholder, contributor, or partner.

Still, there was a certain temptation in the proposition.

It was scarcely possible that the company could put out the book and make a profit out of her £30.

After much reflection, she made this answer:

'THE GABLES, PENBORNE.

'DEAR SIR,

'In answer to your letter of the 8th, I must say that, as no account of the *Up and Doing* Publishing Company, in which I am a shareholder, has reached me for two years, I could not entertain your proposal in regard to "Potmarjoram" in the present unsatisfactory state of affairs. Communications to you have been unavailing.

'Hoping for some explanation of the company's position,
'I am, yours faithfully,

'TITA STORCK.'

This letter evoked the following explanation:

- Dear Madam,
- 'I regret exceedingly that you have any cause of complaint, but as late secretary of the *Up and Doing* Publishing Company, Limited, the matters of which you justly complain were beyond my control.
- 'The *Up and Doing* Publishing Company, Limited, ceased to exist as a company registered under the Companies Acts about twelve months since, and the business was then taken over, without any break, by Mr. Evans, the late manager, and myself, and is now conducted as a partner-ship firm under the same name, but, of course, without the addition of the word "Limited," being no longer a company consisting of members holding shares.
- 'The fact is, the company never had sufficient capital to carry on an extensive business (although Mr. Evans, myself, and two other directors aided it to the extent of about £1,000—and it owed me nearly £500 at its dissolution), and the then editor was unable, single-handed, to give to all the manuscripts sent in the attention they undoubtedly deserved, and many papers possessing merit were never read.

Now, however, we have a competent staff at work, and manuscripts are carefully and promptly read, and I have determined that every manuscript sent in to the old company is looked over and returned without delay if unsuitable. If, on the other hand, any manuscripts possess talent, and our readers advise they can be profitably published, then proposals with that view will be made. It is thus your story comes under my notice, accompanied by an opinion so favourable that I have no hesitation in advising its publication and in undertaking part of the outlay.

- 'Should you entrust your work to us, I can assure you you will have no further ground of complaint, and, having regard to your long connection with us, more than ordinary interest would be taken in promoting the sale and making the work a success.
  - 'Trusting this explanation will be satisfactory to you,
    - 'I am, dear Madam,
      - 'Yours faithfully,
        - ' MARMADUKE MANDEVILLE.
- 'P.S.—As some evidence of the respectability of the new firm, I may mention that I have been for three years a member of the Common Council of this City.'

Tita was much touched, but not exactly in the way Mr. Mandeville would have desired, by the allusion to 'your long connection with us.' The expression called back to her memory all the extortion and neglect to which she had been subjected.

A card enclosed, bidding some unknown one 'Vote for Marmaduke Mandeville,' at a municipal election, forwarded presumably 'as some evidence' that the secretary really was a member of the Common Council, only aroused her contempt.

In her next letter she said:

'I am obliged by your favour of the 11th instant, but I cannot consider such an explanation satisfactory to a

shareholder of the company. Some notice should certainly have been given to the shareholders to inform them that the company had "ceased to exist," and I should imagine that there must have been assets which should have afforded an appreciable return to the company—office fittings, unexpired copyright, stationery, and good-will (which appears to have been worth Mr. Evans's and your appropriation). As no account of the final transactions of the company is in my possession, I do not feel sufficient confidence to risk further capital and the success of a profitable manuscript to the manager and secretary of so disastrous an undertaking. If you choose to accept the novel as a speculation, and pay me £40, the copyright to revert to the author twelve months from the date of agreement, I will engage to correct proof sheets and aid the publication to the best of my ability. If you cannot entertain this proposal, kindly return the manuscript as soon as convenient.'

# Mr. Mandeville replied in course of post:

'I cannot let your remarks about the *Up* and *Doing* Publishing Company, Limited, pass unnoticed. Every shareholder was informed in February last, in the manner prescribed by the Companies Act, that a general meeting of the members would be held, and that at such meeting a resolution would be proposed with a view of winding up its affairs. Such meeting was held, and the result advertised; there my connection with it ceased. The liquidators are, no doubt, getting in the assets, and applying them, as far as they will go, in payment of the liabilities. It will be their duty, not mine, to send an account of the final transactions of the company. I neither know nor do I care how they are progressing.

'With regard to the manuscript, as I told you in my first letter, we are not disposed to purchase, but I think it would pay you to accept the proposed terms. You could retain the copyright, and, as you are now not dealing with a company, but with a firm of standing and high commercial credit in the City, you can rely upon any agreement entered into being faithfully carried out. I await your final answer before returning the manuscript.'

Tita did not fail to observe that his enthusiasm over the story had waned. She guessed that it had never been sincere. She was now fighting a duel with the late secretary, and if she could do nothing else she would fire the last shot. Accordingly, she replied:

'In your letter received yesterday you positively state that in February last a notice of a meeting was served to every shareholder of the Up and Doing Publishing Company, at which a proposal to wind up the affairs of the company would be submitted. I must repeat that no such notice was received by me, nor any report of the meeting. If forwarding reports and answering inquiries were duties beyond the control of the secretary of the company, you, as a man of business, will understand that the interest of a small shareholder did not appear worth a lawyer's letter. You will no doubt regret that such an apparently consistent course of oversight should have led to a misunderstanding in the mind of a shareholder. I am sorry that you have been a victim to the ill-luck of the company to such an extent, and if you are indifferent to the proceedings of the liquidators, being such a large creditor also, it is more than I am.

'I regret that, notwithstanding the individual respectability of the new firm, I cannot feel sufficient confidence to accept your proposal, and beg that you will return the manuscript at your earliest convenience.'

Mr. Mandeville vouchsafed no reply to these taunts, but he returned the manuscript, carriage paid.

Perhaps the liquidators are still at work with the final transactions. Any way, no account of their proceedings has yet reached at least one shareholder.

#### CHAPTER III.

#### A CORNISH CRŒSUS.

'Happy they who thus in faith obey
Their better nature: err sometimes they may,
And some sad thoughts lie heavy in the breast,
Such as by hope deceived are left behind;
But like a shadow these will pass away
From the pure sunshine of a peaceful mind.'
Southey,

WHILE still in a fever of disgust at the vista of tricks and dishonesty which her experience with the publishing company had opened up to her, Tita received a note, written in a trembling hand, from Mr. Williams:

### 'MY DEAR CHILD,

'Come over at once, for I think it is time I should tell you about the disposal of the property.'

Sick at heart, Tita responded to the summons, saying to her mother that Uncle George had sent for her, but mentioning nothing about the property.

Her uncle had been gradually and hopelessly failing in health since his wife's death the year before, but those around him hardly realized that at longest a few months would see the end of his quiet career. To Tita it seemed that this sending for her to discuss his will was like signing his own death-warrant.

She found him perfectly cheerful, but with a fixed deter-

mination to have a clear understanding, and no longer evade what he regarded as an important duty.

'It was your aunt Margery's wish that you should inherit the greater part of her fortune, and in making this arrangement she hoped that Orlando's interest would be as safe as if the money were in his own hands—indeed, I may say safer—for she had not a high opinion, as you may know, of his business capacity.'

'But, uncle, I am not very wise, either. I have never had anything to do with business, and I should not know what to do with a lot of money if I really had a right to it.'

And Tita remembered how she had wondered a few weeks before if she could possibly raise £30 to build herself the giddiest castle in Spain that ever an empty-headed simpleton planned.

'You are quite right, my dear, to mistrust your capability, and I know perfectly well how little you have had to do with this world's wealth; but I have remarked, and your aunt has frequently called my attention to it, that your small allowance has always sufficed for your wants, and you have never contracted any small debts to be carried on from quarter to quarter, or come to us with the soft necessitous air which poor Margery often said made some people's faces remind her of a sponge. Ah, she was a wonderfully penetrating woman! You may depend she knew what was for the best.'

Tita with difficulty suppressed the impulse to call her aunt a cruel, unnatural old woman, but she had not yet forgotten that her aunt's character had been remarkable for good sense and discernment. Yet to hear a 'soft necessitous air' imputed to Orlando—oh, it was misery! Of course he had been necessitous. It was ridiculous to expect a boy, a man, to do with an allowance which would do very well for a girl. He had a larger frame, a larger mind, and of course larger wants and necessities, than a girl, and if he had no

money of his own, because his grandfather had disinherited his father, of course he was always 'necessitous.' How unjust Aunt Margery had always been to him! It was a wonder indeed that he had so long remained 'soft.' Soft, indeed!

This tumult of agitation could not be poured out to her uncle, because he had loved his wife, and it would not have benefited Orlando.

'But the money came from the Carlyons, uncle; I have no right to it. And I could not bear to be rich, and for the others round me to be poor.'

'The others will not be poor; I shall provide for them comfortably according to their position in life. To John's children at Camryn and to his grandchildren who have survived their parents, to your mother and sisters, and to Orlando, I shall leave £3,000 each.'

There were four of the Camryn Williamses now living, and two others had died, leaving six children between them. Tita made a hasty calculation that, as her uncle's fortune had been estimated as not over £50,000 at most, this arrangement would not leave her quite double the sum which was intended for each of the others—not by any means an heiress.

She breathed more freely.

- 'I should think it would be less trouble to leave us all alike.'
- 'That was not Margery's wish. She meant you and Orlando to have the money which came from the South Pond property.'
- 'And how much was that? You know nobody knows how much it was, uncle.'
- 'It was a much smaller sum when your aunt came into the property; but the money has accumulated, and the mine, unlike so many, has increased in value, so that it now stands somewhere about £100,000.'

For a moment Tita thought her uncle's mind must be going. She looked around the unpretentious room in which they were seated. The carpet was threadbare, the chairs were getting raw at the corners, the muslin curtains were darned, the ornaments were cheap. It seemed impossible that the owner of these things should be possessed of nearly £150,000. But looking at her uncle again, it was clear that his mind was not wandering.

She covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

'Don't make me an heiress, Uncle George; I shall never be happy again if you do.'

Mr. Williams was equally puzzled and distressed at this exhibition of feeling. What could it mean? Why did she mind being an heiress? Didn't she want to marry Orlando, and not like to take the property without him?

'My dear child,' he said kindly, 'this is a serious matter. You are still too young to understand its importance. I should like before all things to ensure your happiness. There will be no binding clauses; you will be able to judge and choose for yourself. I do not see what course you would have me adopt.'

'Leave me £3,000 like the others, and give the £100,000 to Orlando. It is simply restitution.'

Mr. Williams was a very just-minded old man, or he would have resented the way Tita insisted on the idea that he had not the right to do as he liked with the money left him by his wife. Her proposition did not commend itself to him as a way out of the difficulty, but it came like a gleam of light in showing the state of her mind. He was groping among his tangled memories for an explanation of Tita's evident dislike to being an heiress. She was not really a child, and very well knew the value of money. It was not ignorance or stupidity which made her hesitate to take such a large slice of his fortune.

At last he said: 'Your aunt Margery did not mind marry-

ing me, though she was rich and I was poor, and we were very happy together.'

'I know it, uncle; but I entreat you to give the money to Orlando.'

'Well, I will think of it. There are other things to be taken into consideration besides pounds, shillings, and pence, when one is dealing with such beings as you,' he said. 'I suppose it will come to the same thing in the end.'

He fondly stroked her small fair head with his bony, smooth fingers. Tita shivered at the touch, though she loved her uncle and appreciated his sympathy. Very few people who had lived into extreme old age would, she knew, have consulted the wishes of a girl like herself. Rather they would have exacted some fantastic devotion for a benefit to be received only when their fleshless fingers could cling to the treasure no more. She had baby recollections of her grim old grandfather, whom nobody dreamed of addressing on the system of common intercourse, and whose senile greed and fatuity made an atmosphere round him more repellent than the dog-scented, tobacco-laden air in which he persisted, in spite of all hygienic laws, in drawing his spasmodic breaths on to the age of ninety. By contrast, Mr. Williams radiated an angelic sanity, broken down though he was, and tottering on the verge of the grave.

Tita dried her tears and thanked him. When she left she kissed him, and kissed him on his shrunken lips.

As she walked home, it seemed to her, in spite of some sadness, that a little bird was singing in her heart: 'I am free, free, free! I am free!'

Now nobody could marry her for her money. She did not ask herself why she had done this—whether it was for Orlando's sake or her own. She did not ask herself if Orlando loved her; but she did wonder if the wild tumult in her breast was love. Whatever was sweet she wanted Orlando to have. Was it a golden sunset? Her first

thought was: 'Oh that Orlando were here!' Was it a rose with a heart of fire? Her first impulse was to snatch it for him before it could fade. But was all that love? She did not know. She knew well enough that there was not the slenderest tie between Orlando and herself; if there had been, she would not have hesitated to take the money, but now they were good friends—nothing more—notwithstanding the frequent allusions to some imaginary understanding in which her sisters and friends seemed fond of indulging.

This very evening she had to stand a torrent of crossquestions and allusions.

Olivia began: 'Why did Uncle George send for you? Was it about the money? Did he want you to promise to marry Orlando when you had it? I would not promise, if I were you. You ought to marry a very real man, if ever you do marry.'

- 'And what do you call a "real man"?' asked Tita, not caring to reply to her sister's direct questions.
- 'Oh, I don't exactly know what it is; but Victor Hugo is my idea of real, and Dean Stanley, and the poet Gray, and there are hosts besides, I dare say.'
  - 'And what is your idea of an unreal man?'
- 'Well, Lord Beaconsfield is what I call not real, and Mr. Whistler, and—and Orlando! You value style too much, style as opposed to tone. Your curled Apollos don't wear, you know.'
- 'I don't know any Apollos, curled or uncurled. There is Mr. Briggs, Arthur Pennant's steward—he is curled, but he isn't exactly an Apollo.'
- 'I wish you would not trip one up with that horrible neutral tone of yours. By a curled Apollo I mean a tooconventional young man.'
  - 'I should like to say I adore conventionality.'
- 'That is it exactly. You admire what you consider "correct" with an unreasonable service. It is beneath you, Tita!

- 'Well, it is not worth making such a fuss about,' chimed in Bianca. 'Of course it is Orlando you are thinking about——'
  - 'Don't draw such hasty conclusions,' interrupted Olivia.
- 'It is not hasty; it is plain as possible,' Bianca persisted. '"Circumstantial evidence is strong," as the man said when he found a trout in the milk. You must mean Orlando. Conventional young men are not so very plentiful round here. It is you that are hasty, for nobody knows that he wants to marry her. And if he does, I dare say when she finds she has £1,000 a year she will not settle down at all. You will go abroad and see the world, won't you, Tita?'
- 'And what will happen if I don't have the money?' asked Tita composedly.
- 'Do you know you won't have it?' asked Olivia apprehensively. There were always hospitals and free libraries and other open-mouthed charities into which Tita was as likely as not to recommend dropping the family savings. 'You might tell us what you know, I think.'
- 'Perhaps we shall have alike, or perhaps Orlando will have the Carlyons' money.'
- 'Oh, it is not possible! Aunt Margery would walk out of her grave before that would happen. But don't you really know what Uncle George has done?'
  - 'No,' said Tita; 'but I am sure he will do what is right.'
- 'I suppose it will be right if he gives you his money and leaves us poor.'

Tita thought it was not to be poor to have bread and water enough, and true hearts around you—that was surely to be rich; but she only said: 'Perhaps we had better think less of Uncle George's money, and more of how good he is.'

A week afterwards Uncle George was dead.

Had he altered his will or not?

Oh, the horror of dead men's shoes!

### CHAPTER IV.

#### CLOTHO AT PLAY.

'Her fingers I lovingly squeezed,
And kissed her and promised her—naething.'
Burns.

It was the evening before the day of the funeral.

Though it was still early in June, there had been a week of dry heat, and Tita, who had been too busy for the last few days to attend to it, was in the garden, watering the parched plants.

She was dressed in a scrupulously clean but evidently old black gown and brown holland apron, and had on odd gloves, discarded by other members of the family, one a long lavender kid—whose fellow Olivia had probably dropped at some bewildering function—and the other a gray cotton, the best of a much-darned pair, given over at last because the elastic at the wrist had come slack with age. There were dark lines under her eyes, and she looked tired. She had no love of gardening, but thought it her duty to do it.

Presently the porch door swung open.

A tall young man of twenty-three or twenty-four came out of the house. His handsome boyish face showed traces of excitement and anxiety, but he evidently had his emotions well under control. He looked a little incongruous in that tiny walled enclosure of drooping peonies and iris, for,

despite the effects of a long journey, his appearance was decidedly 'correct.'

It was Orlando.

Of course Tita was not surprised to see him. As he came forward, there came over her face a sort of expansion, as when the sun's presence opens out the petals of a flower. Then you first saw that Tita was beautiful.

- 'They told me you were out here,' he said, taking the hand which was clad in lavender kid. 'I don't think I should trouble my head about these poor drooping weeds, if I were you. To-morrow you can order in exotics if you like.'
- 'Don't begin about that wretched money. I cannot imagine why everybody should suppose I am to have it.'
- 'Oh, you will, of course! You were the favourite: it's quite fair.'
  - 'You are not jealous of me?'
- 'Not the least in the world. No one will be more rejoiced at your good luck than I shall be. But there are such possibilities in the position. As an heiress you will be as good as lost to us, your poor relations.'
- 'I don't count on it, any way. I don't look like an heiress, do I?'
- 'You look very nice, as usual,' was Orlando's discreet reply.

Then Tita went on with her gardening.

Orlando did not offer to help her, but he followed her about with a sort of regretful persistence.

'This may be the last evening we shall stand on the old footing. I think you might put down that watering-pot and come for a walk.'

There was an absolute wistfulness in his voice.

- 'I am not fit to go outside the garden.'
- 'Oh, never mind your appearance. I don't care. And we need not go through the town, you know. Let us go out on the moors.'

- 'It is too late.'
- 'Nonsense. Come!'

Slowly Tita drew off her gloves, and threw them into a corner with her apron and the watering-pot.

- 'I don't like giving way,' she said.
- 'Oh yes, you do! To-morrow will be soon enough to put on airs of the heiress.'
- 'If you are going to do nothing but imagine I am going to be an heiress, I shall go into the house.'
- 'I will imagine anything you like. Let us pretend nothing has happened. Now, then, over the wall in the old fashion.'

He jumped over the low wall, and lifted her gently down into the rough road, which led through the meadows out to the commons.

They walked on silently for some time. Orlando's eyes were fixed on the ground, he swung his stick thoughtfully to and fro. He was preoccupied.

Presently he looked up quickly, saying: 'You are cold, your hands are turning blue.'

He took them both in his own, which were perfectly formed, but large, as became the proportions of his person.

Tita resigned them with a smile. She enjoyed the warmth which crept through her veins at the contact, and still more the subtle rapport, animal magnetism, or whatever it might be, which such contact caused.

Orlando felt something of this, for he leant over her small head—which was, of course, close to her shoulder and said: 'Ah, Tita, if it weren't for to-morrow!'

She tried to draw her hands away.

He looked into her face, and saw an expression of weariness.

'You are tired,' he said. 'Let us sit down on this stone.'
They had reached a narrow strip of land, where the
meadows had ceased, and the moorland had not yet begun—

a rough place covered with scattered rocks and clumps of bramble. Ever afterwards Tita called it 'between the less lea and the mair.'

They sat down, he still keeping her hands and supporting her against his shoulder.

- 'Nobody will grieve for Uncle George as you will. I can't pretend that his death is a matter of deep regret to me, except as it makes a gulf between us two. Aunt Margery killed all my young affections. She was hard on me—don't you think so?—and I am afraid I am a bad lot. I do hate the office, and I believe I shall hate a steamship before long. I wish old Peters had stayed a cabin-boy to this day.'
- 'For shame! He is one of the most splendid men Cornwall has ever produced. There is no good work that he withholds his hand from.'
- 'I see you are not sorry for me at all,' continued Orlando gloomily; 'and if you do not care——'
- 'I do care,' Tita interrupted; 'but I rather like fighting against fate myself.'

Orlando released her hands and turned up her white face to his own, looking intently into her clear gray eyes.

- 'Your eyes are like two forget-me-nots seen in the twilight,' he exclaimed; 'and yet you do not sympathize with me!'
- 'It is not fair to say that,' said Tita, two tears blurring the gray-blue in her eyes.
- 'No, I know it is not,' said Orlando, relenting. 'Who has ever had such patience with me as you? I will never forget it. But things do seem rather hard to bear sometimes.'
- 'And yet you could have forgiven me for having all your money?' she said tenderly.
  - 'Could have?' he said perplexed. 'I do.'
  - 'I mean you do, of course,' said Tita hastily.

She felt that her only possible part was silence. However fantastic the barrier between them, she could not even sigh on it to blow it down. To adapt the poet's words: 'Oh, the little more, and what worlds away!'

So they fell into a torpor of silence, one of youth's mistaken wisenesses. If we could live our lives over again, how valuable would experience be! What golden apples should we fit into their silver frames! It is this which makes looking back so bitter. Our eyes are blindfolded, and Opportunity passes.

At last Tita spoke demurely: 'Let us go home now.'

- 'And then to-morrow!' said Orlando, rising slowly.
  "Brief parting, brief regret."
- 'That is an ominous quotation,' said Tita, smiling, however. 'If it is to be "quenched in the fumes of best Havana," it will certainly be by you, and not by me.'
- 'I did not know there was anything so good as that about the matter,' said Orlando. 'I thought I was bringing out something from Shakespeare very appropriate to the occasion.'
- 'What would my father have said to have heard you say so!' exclaimed Tita, in a half-mocking tone of voice.
- 'He could not have said anything new,' said Orlando, falling into her humour, 'for he exhausted all he knew of the language in reproving me because you prompted me through those dreadful soliloquies. You were always my good angel. Now that is all over—— But I won't say anything more about it.'
  - 'Why need there be any difference?' said Tita shyly.
- 'I don't know why, I am sure; but you will see it will be so,' said Orlando weakly.

In the twilight they had returned through the street.

'But here we are at the door.'

He pressed her hands for two seconds to his breast. Perhaps had Tita raised them, and clasped them round his neck

there and then, she might have grappled him to her soul with hooks of steel, and much that afterwards happened might have been averted. Might have been! As it was, she, 'like a well-conducted maiden,' let them fall at her side, and entered the house.

The candles were lit when they came in.

Orlando went to the table, and put his finger (very delicately) to the flame, and said: 'How those martyrs must have suffered!'

A sinuous train of ideas had led up to the reflection. As this girl was to be a great heiress, he would not try, through her simplicity, to capture her affections; but a great heiress, of whom he was fond, would be a very convenient supplement to his circumstances, and he felt himself to be a very meritorious young man in refraining at the point he had done.

Next day none of the Storcks remained to hear the will read. They awaited Orlando's return, however, with impatience.

- 'How will he bear it?' said Olivia.
- 'I wonder!' said Tita.

After a long time Orlando came, and with him some of the Williamses of Camryn.

'The most astonishing thing ever heard of!' exclaimed Cousin John. '£100,000 to Carlyon, and £3,000 apiece to the rest of us! It is the greatest sensation there has been for years.'

The Storcks looked at Tita, but she was not given to displaying much emotion, and they were not surprised to see little change in her face.

- 'It is a wonderfully fair will,' she said, facing them all with her clear gray eyes.
- 'She hopes to square the circle for herself,' muttered Mr. Williams, below his breath. 'I only hope she won't be disappointed.'

Then everybody looked at Orlando.

He was very pale, and his gray eyes looked black and glittering. The veins stood up on his forehead.

Mrs. Storck had drawn him down on the sofa beside her, and had taken possession of his hot, trembling hand.

'And what will you do, Orlando?' she said kindly.
Throwing back his head, Orlando answered: 'Now I will see the world.'

#### CHAPTER V.

## LE ROI S'AMUSE.

'And my fause lover stole my rose,
But, ah! he left the thorn wi' me.'

Ye Banks and Brass.

THE west of Cornwall rang with the nine days' wonder of Mr. Williams' will.

At the first flush all concerned in it were satisfied with its provisions, for everyone seemed to have been handsomely treated; but Mrs. Storck and her daughters came to see that somehow Tita had been unfairly dealt with. How much they were themselves to blame for this they did not inquire.

Not that Tita showed any signs of unhappiness. She did not for an instant regret the course she had taken, but I don't think that ever afterwards the conduct of Tita Storck was characterized by its simplicity. She about now lost a little of the childlike expression from her face. She was making her first acquaintance with life.

Bianca and Olivia wished to leave Penborne at once when they found themselves possessed of a competence; but Mrs. Storck's rooted aversion to moving was not to be overcome, so there was no great revolution in their lives.

Olivia's one hope was that Tita would now become a writer in earnest. She thought the shock which recent events had given to her feelings must tend to crystallize her

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mind. In this hope she almost forgave Orlando for what she called his 'conduct.' He did not now, intoxicated though he was with his own good fortune, drop or slight the Storcks; they received numberless tokens of his regard. To Mrs. Storck he wrote as his 'dearest mother.' Jewels of silver and jewels of gold were showered upon the girls, and Mirry's children had a good time; but his letters grew briefer as time went on, and then less frequent. They came from Cowes, from the Highlands, from town, from Baden, from Trouville. It was evident that Orlando was started at a gallop on what is known as the pursuit of pleasure. There was no hardness about his behaviour; he was too fastidious to be cruel. When he did write, he spoke as tenderly as ever of the memories of 'dear old Penborne'; but by the time a year had gone round he had ceased to write at all. They heard of his doings, for where society was there was Orlando. Having a very fine person and excellent manners, he soon took his place in the world of fashion.

Olivia did blame herself for the part she had taken in regard to the supposed understanding between Tita and Orlando. She could now see that it had been very foolish to presuppose any tie between them. However, the mischief was past.

Tita's deportment was no less astonishing to her than Orlando's. No sign of a breaking heart appeared, as month by month went on. She watched for the postman's advent with an increased interest. She studied the society paragraphs in the papers with an unwonted attention. But it was all calmly.

Bianca gave her little sympathy when she asked her opinion on the matter.

'Why, of course, they never were in love with one another,' she said. 'You always will imagine there must be a romance where two or three are gathered together. But that is all nonsense.'

Mirry looked at the matter in quite a different light.

'I am sure I don't understand it,' she said; 'but I don't like the cold way she takes everything. You mark my words, this won't end well. "It is well to be on with the new love before you are off with the old," the proverb says. And that is very true, or you may find yourself with no love at all.'

It was clear that Mirry would not help to elucidate matters. She had excellent common-sense, though her neighbours called her silly; but it was allied to a certain puzzleheadedness, which was equally painful to herself and amusing to her acquaintances.

- 'I really don't think she could have cared for him,' said Olivia. 'I hope she never did. If not, now there is nothing to disturb her, we shall have her making a figure in literature.'
- 'I don't think people ever come to be anything great unless they have gone through a good deal,' said Mirry. 'I think she is more likely to succeed as a writer if she has been in love with him. As my favourite hymn says:

""'Tis love that makes the world go round.""

'I don't believe any hymn says so,' interposed Bianca.
'It seems to me almost a wicked idea. And the proverb doesn't say it is well to be on with the new love before you're off with the old.'

A mistiness came over Mirry's fine eyes, but she did not dispute the point.

- 'You know best about that kind of thing, I know,' she said; 'but, whatever they say, it is true, and Tita is just one of those utterly loyal women who hold a dead dog better than a live lion.'
- 'You are as bad as Olivia, only with her it is marriage, and with you it is love.'
  - 'That reminds me,' said Mirry good-humouredly, and

quite unconscious of the extreme malaproposness of her remark, 'Mr. Fotheringay comes next week. I hope he will be a little diversion for us all. Don't you think if I sent in the children they would be a nice amusement for Tita?'

Now, Mirry's children were a distinct feature in the Storcks' life, and may as well be described at once. By some freak of Nature they were as astonishingly original as their parents were commonplace. The heir was christened Pomroy, or some such fine name, but was always called Jack. The next, a bewitching little girl, whose proper name was Helena, was known among her intimates as Tottie. The next, a boy, christened Thomas, known as Tom, was the most commonplace of the number, which perhaps saved him from the nickname of Bunny or Tib. Two boys followed, very naughty, exactly alike, though not twins, the elder being small for his age, the younger big, and both had whitish hair and blue eyes. They rejoiced in the names of Punch and Squire. 'Arthur called him Squire because he was so big for his age,' the fond mother explained. The baby was still a bundle of Valenciennes lace, with indefinite features, and no very distinct individuality as yet, but a resolute determination not to suck her thumb. They were aged from six downwards. Olivia called them the Olympiads.

This charming group was proposed as an antidote for Tita's love-sickness. As in reality she was not love-sick at all, she accepted the cure with resignation. But the society of the children was far from enough to distract her thoughts from her own affairs. Women are capable of a certain dispersion of attention which is denied, or not evolved, in the sterner sex. A man in love, for instance, will forget himself and carve her name on the forest trees, or even the statuary of some dim cloister in far-distant Rome. He writes his father (at least, we have the poet's

word for it), ending with this line, 'I am, my lovely Nævia, ever thine.' But a woman is wide awake both to the outer and inner life.

For example. It was Jack's sixth birthday, and all the children were assembled in the nursery at the Gables, to celebrate the event in fitting manner without disturbing the serenity of Mr. Fotheringay. Of course their tea was a large feature in the proceedings. The masterpiece of that meal was a plum tart.

- 'Auntie, tell us what our plum-stones mean.'
- 'One to be ready---'
- 'Oh, you goose!' said Tottie severely. 'One, I love; two, I love; three, I love, I say; four, I love with all my heart; five, I cast away; six, he loves—there, I have six! How many have you, auntie? Seven? Let me see. He loves me; he don't; he'll have me; he won't; he would if he could, but he can't; he loves me; he don't! Oh, swallow one!'

Tita, who had been guilty the day before of going into the garden that she might not see the new moon through the glass, scarcely felt justified in contempt.

'I can do them another way,' she said. 'This year, next year, some time, never; this year, next year, some time.'

'That is better,' said Tottie; 'then, you do them my way, and it all comes right. Six, he loves; seven, he loves. Now, auntie, don't you feel more comf'r'able?'

When she had kissed Tottie, the mistress of the ceremonies made the discovery that Punch and Squire, enlightened by their sister's suggestion, were making away with their plum-stones in reality, 'to gain some private ends.'

'More tart, auntie—me only got two plum-stones,' said Punch.

Squire couldn't talk, but he held up his empty plate. Tita made a rough guess that they had swallowed four or five each. Fortunately, Tom was the only one of Mirry's children with whom anything ever disagreed.

- 'Jack's going to be a good boy. Mother told him so,' said Tottie, who was the chatterbox of the party. With inimitable gravity she added: 'He's one good thing now.'
  - 'What's that?' asked Jack with surprised suspicion.
- 'A gooseberry fool, 'cause he went walking with Aunt Livvy and Uncle Fred.'

Fred was Mr. Fotheringay.

- 'Who taught you to call him that?' asked Tita, horrified.
- 'Papa,' was the reply.
- 'But he isn't Uncle Fred, is he? And I ain't a goose-berry fool. I didn't go far, and Mr. Fotheringay gave me a birthday-book and told me to go and get mother to write our names in it. There! I call that a stunner.'

This from Jack. He produced the book, which Tita suspected had not been originally intended as a birthday present for him. It was a good selection of poetry, arranged by E. Davenport Adams.

- 'You write your name, auntie.'
- 'Very well,' she said. 'I will after tea.'

When the children had begun playing Daniel in the lions' den, she took up the book and turned to the 14th o September:

'Where is another sweet as my sweet,
Fine of the fine, shy of the shy?
Fine little hands, fine little feet—
Dewy blue eye.
Shall I write to her, shall I go?
Ask her to marry me by-and-by?
Somebody said that she'd say "No";
Somebody knows that she'll say "Ay"!

Something made her 'feel more comf'r'able.' Was it not very natural that the ancients should consult the oracle?

## THE HERITAGE OF EVE

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She turned back to the 12th of August. That was Orlando's birthday:

'We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon; How restlessly they speed and gleam and quiver, Streaking the darkness radiantly! yet soon Night closes round, and they are lost for ever: Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings Give various response to each varying blast, To whose frail frame no second motion brings One mood or modulation like the last.'

The children's laughter fell on unheeding ears.

Was she in love with him, even while he was 'seeing the world'? If so, how was she so calm?

#### CHAPTER VI.

#### UNE PRÉCIEUSE RIDICULE.

'There are moments of despondency when Shakespeare thought himself no poet, and Michael Angelo no painter.'—Colton.

ABOUT this time—some fifteen months after Mr. Williams' death and Orlando's departure—it was suggested to Tita that she should show some of her writing to a friend with literary tastes, the sister of the clergyman at whose house Olivia had met Mr. Fowler, the editor of Macintosh's. This she consented to do, as she thought the opinion and advice of someone outside her own family might be of real use. Indeed, the opinion of her own friends was that she was very clever, and what she wrote was clever (not by any means inevitably-connected cause and effect), but they were reticent in the matter of advice. A cousin, a very clever man himself, had told her that unless she was a second Charlotte Brontë it was impossible that she should write successfully, situated as she was. This might be considered as advice, of the same class as Punch's to those about to marry; but it was not of a very useful order, and it seemed to fix Tita's determination to make something of the materials at hand. The conviction at the bottom of her endeavours was that what interested her would interest others if she could but discover the means of putting it before them. She had something of the neglected art of the story-teller, but it was subservient to the love of analysis.

The love of analysis leads, even with the best writers, to something like the abortive movement known to amateur rowers as 'catching a crab.' Even lucid Mr. Black, for instance, writes: 'The man was not always mean and offensive; at night he slept. And if in his dreams he ever saw a company of angels, I know that his first instinctive impulse was to watch them, lest they should be stealing their master's time.' Surely the reflection would be more logical if it stood: 'The man was always mean and offensive, even in his sleep. For if in his dreams he ever saw a company of angels, I know that his first instinctive impulse was to watch them.' The critics say, 'The meaning is obscure,' 'the sentence involved.' What is George Meredith's prose but a sequence of clever acrostics? This complication is a drawback to style—at any rate, if art is to be considered as an appeal to humanity at large, which Tita would have been the most eager to proclaim. In her diary, which she now filled in with great fervour, we find many such sentences as this: 'Nothing fascinates a woman so much as the courage to take, unless it may be—the indifference to leave alone.' Corrected in pencil the sentence stands: 'Nothing fascinates a woman so much as the courage which takes-unless it may be the indifference which leaves alone.' Even when corrected as best she could, her expressions were not always lucid. She was perfectly aware of the defect, and tried to cultivate clearness and conciseness. She had taught herself to think in words while yet at the 'herretick' stage, but words slipped out of her memory and left only a sequence of ideas, sometimes confused, sometimes inarticulate. If anyone thinks this no great difficulty, let him imagine Burns, having composed 'The Cotter's Saturday Night,' and 'electrified' his brother with a recital of it, finding himself, when he came to commit it to paper, with only the remembrance of the workman coming home in the evening, and the children

running out to meet him and escort him to supper, and then the eldest daughter coming in, followed by her sweetheart! If anyone could tell her how to catch her ideas, reduce them to language, and retain them in their just relation, then that was advice she would not despise. She knew that impressions were never obliterated; that after she had given up an idea as 'gone, glimmering through the dream of things that were,' some association would recall it; that each thought she had had was engraved on her mind; that every object she had seen was part of an endless panorama stored in her remembrance. But how was she to recover the idea, or describe the picture when the necessities of her art required it? She knew there were very successful writers who worked on the hand-to-mouth plan-Anthony Trollope's name always recurred to her easily enough in association with this idea—but it seemed to her that it could not be the highest style. In reality she had a marvellous memory, but to remember she must not only think but feel. This was the reason that afterwards her writing was remarked to be much fuller of allusion than quotation. Now she was conscious of a painful lack of system, and she might in her despondency have given over her efforts altogether had she not refreshed herself with the reflection that such a persistent impulse to express herself was in itself a warrant that she had something to say.

'Where there is so much smoke there must be some fire,' she said.

How was she to blow this fire into a blaze?

'Get Miss Cartwright to help you,' suggested Olivia.

Tita accordingly sent to her sister's friend the manuscript of a short story. It happened to be called 'A Foregone Conclusion,' a name which Mr. Howells has given to one of the best of his books. As Tita's 'deduction' never was published, Mr. Howells possesses undisputed right to his title. This suggests a Payn-ful reflection. Why has not

one person as good a right as another to his own spontaneous idea? As a rule, the names which Providence gave to Tita's books—for they flashed into her mind as facts—were such as were not likely to have occurred to anyone else. Has anyone else called a novel 'The Chosen of Adonis' or entitled a sketch 'Any Man's Legs'? She certainly was original, and the case of 'A Foregone Conclusion' was only 'the exception which proves the rule,' to borrow a useful if unsound maxim.

Let us see what kind of help the literary aspirant gets from his or her friends.

'To begin with, my estimate of your powers is a high one,' wrote Miss Cartwright; 'but incident there is none, and the interest rests on a few characters; indeed, I might say two, for W. Smith is only touched slightly, and comes in as a foil to Ferdinand. You say justly in your letter that trifles make up life, but if trifles make up life, and few are called to do or suffer any great things, aspirations, aims, may be high—and yet Ferdinand is despicable all through. If the reflections of any are to be recorded, there should be something ambitious in them-ambitious, I mean, in a right sense. Ferdinand's thoughts of Marian, boy as he is, are entirely selfish and unmanly. There is a bitterness in some parts of your writing that I don't like, and don't think that I wanted serious reflections; but the natural high aim that pure love of a noble woman (of course, a fancy type; love is blind, and creates its object) should inspire in a young man, not a wish to disturb her serenity, or excite feelings in her possibly never to be realized, but to prepare himself to be worthy of her as guide and protector. I think Marian so little, too. As to the opera, you had better have taken her to a Drawing-room, because no one would wish to spoil a good dress in an opera-house, crushed in a box which is small, and there was no occasion for display of dress or bearing, though Ferdinand is credited with qualms as to her

appearance, etc., as if she, and not the performance, were to be criticised. Ferdinand's ideas of women are evidently as pieces of furniture—useful and somewhat ornamental, and all with a sort of reflected light on him. I think old maids are scarcely fair judges of such very love-sick characters as yours. I wish I could introduce you to a more congenial spirit, as I am afraid I feel to you, to say the least, very unsympathetic. I like your mottoes and quotations, and your own reflections are often just and thoughtful. I felt quite vexed with your fancy's creations. I don't think a young author ought to coin words or borrow coined words. "Do into words" is as ugly as incorrect, and "translate" is not an equivalent; but surely it is easy to express your meaning correctly and elegantly. I cannot remember the context sufficiently to explain.'

Tita read this admirable letter aloud to her sisters, commenting as she went. She began to suspect right-angular criticism when she saw her Walter called 'W. Smith.' Like Job's war-horse, she smelled the battle afar, and was not affrighted. She had never meant to represent her hero as despicable, but she saw in an instant that she had conveyed an idea of the exquisite egotism which was the keynote of his character. (Sheer selfishness rich Miss Cartwright thought it—she who took her grand house and many servants and flowers and dainty dishes as a natural dispensation of Providence, carelessly leaving on the edge of her plate half of the breast of a pheasant, which had perhaps agonized away its life to add a flavour to her meal.) Was it despicable to wish to disturb the serenity of the woman he loved or excite feelings possibly never to be satisfied? Was it wise to expect as the 'natural high aim' of an ordinary young man that he should prepare himself to be worthy of her as guide and protector? I am afraid Tita had never kept before her eyes the desirability of a prepared guide and protector, and the idea raised an inward smile.

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This fugitive sense of enjoyment haunted her, and when she came to the expression 'surely it is easy to express your meaning correctly and elegantly,' she gave a silvery laugh.

"I cannot remember the context sufficiently to explain." That is unlucky, she said, in a mischievous tone, for an illustration of what would have been better is exactly what I wanted. "Illustrations are the windows which let in the light."

'I call it captious cavilling,' said Olivia hotly, 'and it does not treat of the thing as a whole. Just carping at individual expressions does not seem to me to be criticism at all. I confess I have sometimes thought your sentences hard to understand, but I put that down to my own incapacity, as I have observed the same thing in certain other writers of merit.'

'I know it is a great fault of mine, and I shall strive to correct it. I think Miss Cartwright has given me more encouragement than I deserve. It is really only my taste that she finds serious fault with, and I think she misunderstands me. I never meant Marian to be a noble woman, nor Ferdinand's liking to be pure love. We were telling stories to pass the time as we drove home from the recital last week, and Miss Campbell, to cap everybody else, told us of a missionary's daughter who wanted to marry a black man, and her friends warned her that if she did their children would be stripy. It seems to me that we are all of us the children of black and white, good and evil, and very stripy beings indeed, and it is no use representing your characters as wholly noble, or always ambitious in a right sense. That is not holding the mirror up to nature. But here is a postscript: "You grate on me when you affect a sort of sharpness. I don't know whether you mean to be fast, but it is not you, and it does not suit you. However, I have sent your manuscript to a friend who does not know you, and you shall have an independent criticism."'

- 'What an idea to suggest that you wish to be fast!' exclaimed Bianca—'you who love conventionality so!'
- 'What she says is very true, Bianca. My writing is not me. It is what I observe—"a round unvarnished tale."'
  - 'But how horrible to be judged in that way!'
- 'It is what we must expect. It is the price we pay for being true.'
- 'Perhaps her friend will not have such strict views,' suggested Olivia. 'I think I detect the clerical element in Miss Cartwright's remarks.'

A few days after a note came in which Miss Cartwright said: 'I enclose my friend's letter, and you will see she writes in plainer language than I do; but I think you will feel what I meant when I said I was not sure whether you wished to seem fast.'

'MAY BANK.

## 'My DEAR MISS CARTWRIGHT,

- 'Thank you for so kindly letting me see the manuscript of "A Foregone Conclusion." It strikes me as being written by a lady of culture and much reading; the quotations are apt and well chosen, and now and then there are little bits of philosophizing which show she is clever and thoughtful.
- 'Had a few details been added, such as describing the home and surroundings of Marian, it seems to me it would have made the story more complete, and inhanced the reader's interest. I may be quite wrong; but as you ask for my candid opinion, I shall point out a few passages which strike me, as an impartial reader, as great defects.
- 'It is not good English, I think, nor usual, to end a sentense with a preposition—I noticed two so ending, one I do not now recall, but on page 3—Part I., a paragraph ends in this awkward way—"a volume with a marker a few pages in." Of course these may be only from want of care—but later on there are two or three passages which strike me as most unpleasant and almost coarse.'

Tita read aloud so far, not even stopping to point out the very liberal spelling, but now she hesitated and read a few lines to herself.

- 'Come, Tita, don't torture us,' said Bianca.
- 'Part I., page 5: "Ferdinand exclaimed, 'I would marry anything but a woman with epileptic fits; I should not like a lot of half-mad children, I can't say I should; but anything else "—unusual outspokenness in such young people, and scarcely decorous, one thinks!'
- 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' exclaimed Tita. 'I believe he really said "kids."'

The three girls joined in a merry laugh, for they all knew who he was.

- 'I certainly hope this kind of criticism is not unfair, but two other expressions occur near the end in Part III., and on pages 5 and 6, which are odd, to say the least, viz.: "Ferdinand's withers were not unwrung"—One has heard of a horse's withers, but never of a man's—It sounds unpleasantly, as well as, on the next page, "a thrill of approval down his spinal column"—and "a pea-soup fog" would not sound amiss as the off language of a schoolboy, but crude and undignified as used here.
- 'Pardon my frankness, dear Miss Cartwright, and believe me,
  - 'Yours most sincerely,
    'MARIA ANASTASIA WINTER.'

To the daughters of a distinguished Shakespearian scholar that allusion to the unwrung withers was what Sancho Panza calls tarts and cheesecakes. The fugitive sense of pleasure which inexperienced people get when the wise ones of the world correct them when they know they are right compensates for many things.

There was once a reader to one of the publishing firms

who frequently failed to recognise quotations, rather to the amusement than the edification of the authors. For instance, in a narrative passage one of them quoted the lines:

'Surely down the avenue of chestnuts
I can hear a horseman ride!'

and this reader suggested as an improvement that it should run:

'I can surely hear a horseman ride down the avenue of chestnuts!'

That writer attempted a revenge. One of the chapters, in which the heroine has to divert the evil spirit of her uncle Samuel, was appropriately headed, 'Harping before Saul,' and the writer, underlining the 'Saul,' asked, 'Do you think it would be better to put Samuel?' But probably that reader goes on improving the authors' quotations to this day, and probably Miss Winter's withers are still unwrung.

As to the thrill of approval down his spinal column, where can the coarseness be? Is it shocking of Mr. Zangwill to write: 'A thrill shot down the painter's spine'? Are refined people to suppose that their fellow-creatures have neither muscle nor bone?

- 'It is no good looking for help in that quarter!' exclaimed Olivia.
- 'I think it is a very well-written letter, though,' said Tita humbly.

The two others looked at her in astonishment.

- 'You don't mean to be guided by such an opinion as that? Why, Miss Cartwright is a Titan of intellect compared to Miss Winter!'
- 'They both say one thing, you see,' said Tita nervously. And then, looking coaxingly at her sisters, she added in a low voice of entreaty: 'You don't think my writing makes me fast, do you? You don't think I should get different

from other women? I wouldn't be indecorous, you know, if I could be a Sappho to-morrow!'

This speech and the tone in which it was uttered filled Bianca and Olivia with dismay. What compunction was moving Tita that she should mind having her writing considered 'strong'? Was she beginning to distrust her own capabilities?

- 'I should not care a bit what people said,' said Bianca.
- 'I should not care what people said as long as I felt what I was writing to be true,' said Olivia. 'You once asked someone if the sculptor ought to have added a piece to the bottom of Socrates' nose. Why have you lost your belief in the absolute truth?'
- 'But I do not see that what Miss Cartwright and Miss Winter object to is bad tone,' said Tita evasively; 'so I must be, or I may be, deficient in taste.'
- 'Two days ago,' said Olivia severely, but with a quaking heart, 'you said there was a great deal too much taste, good taste, in the world—that it was the curse of the age. And now you want to set it up above the truth!'
- 'I will never do that,' said Tita firmly. 'But art should know where to "draw the line," and I am not sure that I know that.'

## CHAPTER VII.

#### WHICH SAPPHO?

'Sappho, a distinguished Greek poetess, must not be confounded with a later Sappho, famous for having thrown herself from the Leucadian Rock, in despair, on account of her unrequited love for a youth named Phaon.'—Bellchamber's Biographical Dictionary.

It has been said that 'with the offspring of genius the law of parturition is reversed: the throes are in the conception, the pleasure in the birth;' but such was not the case with Tita Storck. It required an effort of will to concentrate her thoughts on her writing, and then, as she frequently lamented, her ideas shot off into infinity, like wandering stars, if the wind but blew a leaf against the window-pane. She hoped to kill or outgrow this extreme sensitivity, for it seemed to her a more deadly enemy to composition than barrenness of experience.

It will be easily understood that the criticisms of her friends on 'A Foregone Conclusion' tended to increase this nervous irritability. It required all Olivia's powers of encouragement to prevent her throwing down her pen and paper and exclaiming, 'I have no pleasure in them.'

'Suppose you come down from your "Alpine metaphysic glaciers," suggested Olivia. 'You have a keen sense of humour. Write us something amusing. But don't be too satirical.'

'I know what you would say,' responded Tita. 'Personal

satire is a two-edged sword which wounds the hand which wields as well as that which wards. Keep your irony for your declining years. Be gay, be funny. Follow Molière's example, and write down to the comprehension of your cook. I am weary of that story, believing in the bottom of my heart that Molière's housekeeper was probably a woman of very high capacity.'

'You need not think anything about cooks and house-keepers. Just try to write what mother and I can understand and like. The paper you wrote the other day on Horatio was very clever, I dare say, but no one would care to read it who was not a close student of Shakespeare. Bring your mind down to human interests, and then express yourself, as Miss Cartwright wishes, in language at once correct and elegant—and intelligible.'

'As Pope says,

"In words as fashion the same rule will hold;
Alike fantastic, if too new or old:
Be not the first by whom the new is try'd,
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

Miss Cartwright objected to the word "disillusionizement," and I own I thought it was an invention of my own. But the other day I was "disillusionized" in a standard author. One need not be afraid of falling into *original* sin. Originality is only unconscious ignorance. The only chance of being original is to know what everybody else has said, and even that reflection has been made before.

It will be seen from this that Tita was in a cynical, hopeless humour. This mood was influenced more from within than without. Her doctor would probably have told her that her digestion was to blame; her mother would have mentioned nerves. There might, perhaps, be a source of unrest, of which they knew nothing, which disqualified her from saying, 'My heart is fixed.'

The dialogue given above took place in a room now

known at the Gables as the 'study.' The house was old and large, and had figured in Dr. Williams' will in place of the traditional shilling. It was larger than Mrs. Storck would have cared to occupy in her poverty, but it was impossible to let it, and it had been deemed more economical to keep it on than to rent a smaller one. Since Mr. George Williams' death it had been refurnished and a room fitted up for the girls' use, overlooking the quaint back-garden, where there was a mediar-tree, a moss-grown seat, and a wealth of stocks and marigolds. One at the front had been reclaimed as a play-room for Mirry's children. These were the most remarkable changes which had been wrought in the house by the accession to competence of its occupants, though a rough girl from the country now supplemented Selina's exertions indoors, and a man came daily to work in the gardens. It was an inexplicable mystery to Mrs. Storck why the family did not seem much better off on £700 a year than they had been on £200. But such was the case. The truth was that the untrained girl was little use and considerable expense, as Selina frequently pointed out: 'Wot with yer wastefulness and yer smashin', and doin' everything that you do do the wrong way, and leavin' the soap in the dipper, and wastin' matches to light a candle when they perspectusses is sent a purpose, and takin' my clean kitchen cloths to go to yer smutty oven, my dear life, you're a deal more plague than profit.'

Mrs. Storck submitted gladly to a costly and precarious supply of vegetables and fruit, after suffering for years at the sight of first her husband and then her daughters growing hot and muddy in their attempts to grow a succession of useful products and keep up a semblance of order throughout their premises. The girls took the matter philosophically. 'One has to pay for being better off,' they said.

So it happened that the study was the most remarkable improvement.

Here Tita was safe from the pursuit of 'mack'rel' and itinerant literature, and here, in a deep cupboard, was kept the mysterious black velvet cap which she put on when, as she phrased it, she felt inclined to take up her parable. She had long been in the habit of taking the hairpins out of her braids, and unbuttoning the waistband of her gown, before she settled down to her work. This curious mode of invoking the Muses she called 'levelling the sexes.' There were peculiarities about Tita's mind, as there probably are about all remarkable people's. One was that she, so to speak, went to sleep awake, and woke up asleep; that is to say, she had none of those dreamy moments which, with most people, precede going to sleep and follow waking up. This peculiarity probably gave her two hours a day more thinking time than falls to most people's lot, and it was in those late and early hours that she most longed for some system to fix her floating thoughts. As we know, no one had suggested such a system, and probably nothing but practice would enable her to do so. At present she was in the worst possible frame of mind for literary work. Had she been able to say with David, 'My heart is fixed,' let it be on earth or on heaven, she would probably have found her pen that of a ready writer. But she was full of restlessness and indecision.

It did not escape Olivia's vigilant eye that Tita was now particular about her dress and appearance in a way she had never been before. Of course great expense in this matter had been out of the question for any of them; but Mrs. Storck was wont to say that Mirry's personal expenditure before her marriage had been as much as the three others' put together, and that Olivia cost as much as Bianca and Tita. Her arithmetic did not go the length of proving what the proportional expense of each was. Bianca and Olivia had eked out their slender means with sundry feminine devices, for which Mirry 'never had time,' which enabled

them to keep pace with their richer neighbours, the wives of the lawyer and doctor. Tita had preferred the plan of reducing her wants to Puritanical plainness. She had always been excessively neat, prim some people called it. Now she studied the fit of her gown with a view to something besides comfort. Her small feet and hands were daintily covered, her hair was invited to wave over her forehead, and altogether she displayed many weaknesses of which her sisters would have judged her incapable. What was the meaning of this? Had it anything to do with the restlessness which prevented her settling down to serious work?

On this afternoon, when she had declared that it was impossible to be original, she was evidently in a hopeless mood. Olivia's glance—perhaps not quite full of such unmixed sympathy as usual—was a reproach to her, and added to her disquietude.

At last she put away her cap and retreated discomfited.

It chanced that in making her way to the back-garden she passed through the kitchen, where Selina was 'vamping' a stocking. Selina was only eighteen, but she looked years older than her young mistress. She could carry twice as heavy a weight, and was altogether a more responsible person, but she could not knit off the heel of a stocking, that was clear.

Tita paused and offered to show her how it should be done.

'Thank you, miss. I never had time to knit when I lived with Mrs. Shelly. It was nothin' but work, work, all day long; and that Sarah was at you mornin', noon, and night, if you just took up a bit of yer own sewin'; I should have been there to this day if she hadn't been so disagreeable, and such a fearful story-teller, and bein' in the family twenty years she knew she might do just wot she liked.'

'I don't know Mrs. Shelly, but I have heard she is an

excellent manager,' said Tita sedately, 'and if she kept a maid so long no doubt she was a good one.'

'She was attached to the family, there was no denyin' that, and good to Mrs. Shelly, who was rather ailin', and nobody could do for Miss Shelly like she could. Miss Shelly was an invalid all the time I was there, and all on account of her brother. He and a cook they had at one time were suspected of bein' rather thick, and that Sarah watched, and found them out. She was sent about her business, and he was sent to America, and Mr. Shelly never corresponded with him any more than if he had been dead. And it preyed on Miss Shelly's mind, and it seemed she was always thinkin' of him. She had a good spirit, too, and didn't give in, but went about amongst the poor folks as long as she could, and people told me she used to crawl round when she was almost two-double. She was a great teetotaler, like you, miss; but her father, when she was ill, would make her drink wine and spirits to keep up her strength. She would never say anything while he was in the room, but when he was gone she would cry fit to break your heart to see her. Her father and mother didn't believe she was so very bad; said the doctor thought he'd got a good job and meant to keep it on through the summer. That made her cry, too, when their backs were turned; and one day she said she felt better and was sure she could get up, so we helped her out of bed, but she fell all along, and we had to put her back again, and I don't believe she'll ever be any better, and always she was sayin', "Oh, Willie, Willie!" Sarah used to have to put on blisters to her back and take them off, and sometimes Miss Shelly would faint, and she would faint while she was doin' it, and I had to pick 'em both up. But nobody could help lovin' Miss Mary, she tried so to be brave, and she used to make mats and the prettiest little things as she lay in bed, till she grew too weak. One day she had the toothache, and the doctor pulled the tooth out, and stopped the bleedin', and went away, and at ten o'clock we all went to bed. It was between twelve and one when the bell rang, and me and Sarah went down and found Miss Shelly out of bed with her washbasin half full of blood. How she got to the washstand, and how she rang the bell, we could never tell. We never thought she would live after that. Then I had to stay with her by night, and sometimes it was enough to make one's blood run cold. She would start up in bed and cry out, "Oh, Willie, Willie, how could you?" and then fall back exhausted, and doze off, and then cry out, "Oh, Willie!" That nasty cook used to go about the same as ever, and when people said to her, "'Tis killin' Miss Shelly," she said, "I don't care. I have a letter from Master Willie by every mail." But they say it isn't true, and that she never hears at all, as of course he don't care anything about her now he's over there.'

Tita had finished the knitting, but she stood listening, spell-bound. It seemed to her that in this horrible story, which was made a thousand times more tragic by the artless way this child, who was a woman, told it, she had a glimpse of life, and surely it was like seeing through a chink into the world below. And yet Miss Shelly seemed to her, as she heard her story for the first time, nothing less than an angel. She had often heard of the invalid, though she lived at the other side of Eyelets, and so out of the immediate district, but never before the whole story, and the heart - broken cry, 'Oh, Willie, Willie, how could you?' rang in her ears. She herself was very hard on transgressors, setting her face like a flint against those she thought had crossed the Rubicon. She had always thought it right to do so. But now it seemed to her this thing she was told was divine. What was it but 'Reproach hath broken my heart'? She should have scorned and hated a brother who had been so weak. Her love would have died at such a blow. She knew this, and yet she saw that the other woman was right.

She crept away from Selina to think over this sad story, and to ask herself if behind much that was commonplace the heroic might lie.

She had not been meditating in the garden ten minutes, when Ruth was sent to call her back to the house.

Mrs. Storck and Bianca were absent on a round of calls—which were paid with formal regularity at the Vicarage and other high places—and Mirry and Mr. Fotheringay had arrived.

Here was a goodly instalment of the commonplace, but Tita was feeling in a state of spiritual exaltation, which made her glad to embrace any opportunity of self-sacrifice that came to hand.

Mirry evidently wanted an audience, and was relating her trouble as Tita came in.

'We really ought to have a governess, but Arthur will not hear of it, and says he can't and won't have his life spoiled by having a strange woman in the house, just as if a governess were something imported from the South Sea Islands. The children must grow up in ignorance. don't know very much myself, and I have not time to teach them that. But we do Slater's dates, and they are capital, you know. You first learn that the figures stand for certain letters: I stands for t—I don't know why, I'm sure, but it seems very natural. Then you learn the dates. I never had any trouble to remember them, because the figures make a picture in one's head—Battle of Waterloo, 1815, don't you see? Then, the figures make you think of the letters they stand for-Conquest of England by William the Conqueror, 1066, t.s.d.d.: "This Sovereign is a Daring Dog." Isn't it a capital plan? You might begin now, but it is better to do so while you are very young, as it is a strain on one's memory: for you see you have to learn the

dates and the letters, and the lines as well; but it is an excellent exercise. Perhaps you had them at Oxford?'

'Well, no, I am afraid we never went in for anything so deep,' laughed her guest.

Mirry sighed, and continued gravely: 'I never can find out what Arthur learnt there. He only seems to remember the songs and jokes, and his schooldays were no better. He was at West Buckland at one time, you know, and I am afraid he profited very little by his studies, sacred or profane. The other day he was telling a story of a boy's examination paper-I don't know that it was a West Buckland boy's—but such stories crop up at examination times. The subject given was Jezebel, and the boy wrote: "As Jehu entered into Jezreel, Jezebel painted her face and tired her head and looked out of the window. And Jehu said, 'Who is on my side? Who?' And there looked out unto him two eunuchs. And he said, 'Throw her down.' So they threw her down. And he said, 'Do it again.' And they did it again, and they did it until seventy times seven. And last of all the woman died also. And they took up of the fragments that remained twelve basketsful." sure the boy that wrote that was not Arthur himself, for he would never have known whether it was Jehu or Jeroboam, or Jezreel or Jericho. He says he didn't belong to the reading set, and that is how it is, I suppose. But you did, of course, as everybody says you're so clever, so I thought you might have had Slater's Dates. That reminds me I was going to say, Could Olivia come out and give Jack and Tottie some French exercises to do to keep them out of the way while you are here, as I have less time than ever, of course? Don't you think that would be a capital plan, girls?'

She turned from Mr. Fotheringay to her sisters, as much to hide the indecent triumph she felt to be irradiating her face at this successful introduction of her subtle scheme as to consult their opinion, as she considered 'the girls' rather too clever for everyday matters, 'human nature's daily food.'

Tita said she thought it an excellent plan. Children could never begin French too early, as they picked up the accent in their youth better than they ever could do afterwards, and, of course, Olivia's accent must be good, as she had been at school in Paris.

'As to accent,' said Mr. Fotheringay, rather superciliously, 'I never heard anything like the way the Cornish fishermen speak. It is only equalled by their spelling. Mrs. Pennant had a letter to-day, which I captured as a specimen, and may show you, I suppose, as it is no doubt from an old friend. She read it without a smile, and only said at one part, "The dear child!" When Pennant got it he laughed till he brought the plaster down from the ceiling, so I thought I must see it. Here it is. I may show it, I suppose?"

'Of course,' said Mirry; 'they know how to appreciate a letter like that.'

'MY DEAR MRS. we recived the frail all rite and we thank you very much for the ham it where very Good indeed our children wonted some soon as they seen it our little charls say when he Groes up to a man he will send something Beter then a crab to Mrs. Pennant for her is a very kind lady their is karce a day goes over his hed without he hasking for Mr. or Mrs. Pennant and where they lives for he says he would wolk their isself But he thinks he should Be afraid he takes a Bit of Paper and Pencel sit down and try to rite a letter to you in his way twoud make any Percon laguf to se whot he Puts down from the top to the Botem if their is any thing that i can do for you i will send it out with Plesure our love to all and thanks i reamin

'Your obedient severent

'A. JENKIN.'

'She was a good servant,' said Mirry regretfully. 'I think any stranger must own that Cornish people are thrifty;

not that there was much economy at home before I came there. That horrid Mrs. Banks was as extravagant as she was incapable. I suggested bacon and broad beans for the kitchen dinner one day, and she gave warning at once. I was very glad to be rid of her. Bacon and beans! Why, it is nice enough for anybody. Arthur used to sing a song about it, which some of the undergraduates who weren't very rich made up, I suppose:

"" Wrap the beans round the bacon."

No; it couldn't have been that, though. You couldn't wrap beans round bacon. Yet I am sure it was; I remember quite distinctly. And that good-for-nothing woman was too proud to eat what gentlemen made a song about!'

- 'Ann Jenkin was a very good exchange,' said Tita pacifically, 'and I call that a very nice letter.'
- 'Of course it is very nice,' said Mr. Fotheringay; 'but the spelling proves that the new Educational Code has not come too soon for Cornwall. And I will stand to it that the way they talk is unintelligible.'
- 'Did you not bring down from London an illustrated book of nursery poetry, in which there is mentioned an old gentleman of *Moldavia*, who was somewhat erratic in *behaviour*, and a citizen of *Buda*, whose conduct got ruder and *ruder?* And after your "Cockney rhymes" you talk to us of accent!

This little burst of temper from the self-sacrificing Tita. And she added rather too conclusively:

- 'Orlando always said he noticed how purely we spoke when he came back to Cornwall.'
- 'He will have a right to be a judge if ever he comes again,' said Olivia.

After that speech Tita knew little more that followed.

If ever he came back! Would there be spring no more? Would the swallows cease to return to 'last year's nests'? Would the snowdrops never 'gleam the garden path adown'? Would Orlando never come again?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DOWN THE EASY SLOPE.

'But Providence, having gifted him with unusual advantages of body, and so forth, seemed to think its duty done, and to leave him to the devil afterwards. This is a bad way of beginning life, especially at too young an age to be up to its philosophy; and the only thing that can save such a man is a tremendous illness, or the downright love of a first-rate woman.'—The Maid of Sher.

OLIVIA STORCK was endowed with an attractiveness very difficult to define. She was ambitious without being selfish. and having made up her mind as to what was, for her, the attainable best, she set herself to win it without the paralyzing misgiving that we float our barque of joy upon the sea of others' tears—a reflection which clogs the energies of more sensitive spirits. She was proud, with little definitions as to what was due to herself which seemed ridiculous to Bianca and Tita, though they were not without a furtive admiration for the way she made her claims good. Bianca was harsh enough to say that she was 'a Radical as to the classes and a Tory as to the masses.' Tita, whose censure was generally too measured to wound, had formerly attempted to check what she considered extravagant aspirations with cold-blooded logic; but Olivia had ignored her suggestions. and now Tita herself had come to see that pride and exaction made practically less of a barrier than her own shyness. It was a well-known fact that Mr. Briggs had boldly laid his stewardship and curly locks at Olivia's feet, though even

the possession of a nice freehold property could not quite raise him to the level of the 'upper ten' of Penborne, and far from resenting the presumption, she had always loyally befriended him, and never hesitated to shake him by the hand when they met in the market-place.

It was Tita who quoted:

'When Adam delved, and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?'

and Olivia who answered, with conviction: 'Adam.'

Yet Olivia was on easy terms with many who characterized Tita as 'stuck up,' and Bianca as 'touchy.'

Mirry, born under a happier star than either of the others, had been liked by everyone, and her brilliant marriage, loving and beloved, had established her in an easy philosophy, which she had had no experiences to shake. That everything was ordered for the best, and, as one of Mr. Laurence Oliphant's characters says, 'you had better believe it,' summed up her theory of life. To her mind it was perfectly clear that Mr. Fotheringay was the hemisphere gravitating to complete Olivia's existence. 'Who else is there?' she guilelessly argued with herself. And she was quite guiltless of any profanity in supplementing omnipotence with sundry stratagems which commended themselves to her habit of thought. The children's lessons were not allowed to trench on the intervals of agreeable ease between the partridge-shooting and the meals.

The lovers saw through her every artifice, and if they did not 'feel the compliment,' they swallowed 'the dish.' Indeed, with the prospect of a big quarrel among some of his aristocratic connections—certain to lead to a lawsuit—Mr. Fotheringay proposed, and was accepted.

It puzzled the light and leading of Penborne that Olivia should accept a penniless barrister; 'but you may be sure she knows what she is after.'

I fear Olivia was after 'an opening at last.'

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And the prospect of a gayer life opened out at once.

Mr. Fotheringay was on his way to Nice to join his mother and his aunt—the 'somebody' who was to 'leave him some money if Providence meant him to marry Olivia,' according to Mirry.

Olivia had long promised to visit a schoolfellow in Paris, and this was considered an excellent opportunity for her to do so. Mr. Fotheringay could see her safely under the care of the Bonchauds, and take a delightful peep at the gaiety of Paris, now filling with the pilgrims of fashion from Trouville, Dieppe, Boulogne, and other resorts of ennui in high places.

So it was proposed, and so executed.

Among the diversions which Jeanne Bonchaud decided to honour with her presence were the races at Longchamps. It was discovered that Mr. Fotheringay had an uncle who had ruined himself on the turf, and so racing must be particularly interesting to him and his francée. At this time the French were bitten with a passion for horse-racing, or, rather, betting on the running, and everyone, from Ministers to cabmen, from princesses to filles de chambre, laid on all the events. The mania ran to such an extent that even the women would bet on the English races. Gambling in any form had a furious charm for our volatile neighbours.

Even the shrewd Olivia took the epidemic.

The weather was perfect, the excitement at fever-heat, and, to crown the dangerous enjoyment, the favourite won the race in which she was interested.

As the Bonchaud party was leaving the enclosure, a voice, by no means low, speaking in English, caught Olivia's ear. She turned sharply round, and her eyes met those of Orlando.

He left the knot of men to whom he had been talking, and came to her immediately, evidently delighted at the encounter.

'How did you get here?' he demanded, as they shook hands.

- 'I came with the Bonchauds, with whom I am staying.'
- 'And who are the Bonchauds?'
- 'M. Bonchaud is a practical scientist, and finds some of the sinews of war for his friend M. de Lesseps.'
  - 'And who is M. de Lesseps?'

Mr. Fotheringay and Jeanne turned round in time to hear this question, and both smiled.

Orlando knew Mr. Fotheringay, and he was at once presented to Jeanne.

'Don't let us defer,' said that young lady mischievously; 'explain who is M. de Lesseps.'

Orlando looked annoyed, and the pleasant expression of welcome passed entirely out of his face, and Olivia noticed a certain hardness in it which was quite a new characteristic.

She took his arm, and, smiling at her friend, remarked: 'Your prince of canal-cutters is not quite such a universal celebrity as you may suppose. When I was staying in London with the Cartwrights—you remember Janet?—I thought I would rub up my French by having a few conversational lessons. One day I said to my mistress, a fat, brown-eyed woman, French of the French, that I had been to the Geographical Society's conversazione, and heard M. de Lesseps speak. "Et qui donc est ce M. de Lesseps? Est-il un professeur?" she asked. I said to myself: "Such is fame! Even the man of science seems to be unheard of three-quarters of a mile from home."

So saying, Olivia dismissed her lover and her friend in advance, and asked Orlando what he was doing in Paris.

- 'I am staying at the Grand Hotel,' he answered. 'I have been at Dieppe, and drifted here with the tide. It is the queen of cities. Everything is perfect but the women; they are too "made up" and too bold. How is Tita—and your mother and the others?'
- 'They are very well, thank you. They will be delighted to hear I have seen you.'

- 'Oh, do you think so? Do you think they will care?' There was a catch in his voice as he spoke, but he hurried on without waiting for an answer: 'As Mr. Fotheringay seems to be your body-guard, I suppose I must congratulate you on your engagement.'
- 'We are engaged, but he is on his way to join his mother at Nice in a few days; that is how he happens to be my escort.'
- 'What are you going to do to-night? Are you going to Lady Vandemon's farewell party?'
- 'No; we are going to the Comédie to see Sarah Bernhardt.'
- 'I am rather tired of the divine Sarah. There, you see, I know some of their fine celebrities! She is as artificial as the rest of them. Will you be at the races at Auteuil or Vincennes?'
- 'Perhaps. We have been betting and winning, too. Penborne would be quite shocked. Everyone seems mad about speculation here. Have you lost or won to-day?'
- 'I have lost a pot of money, but it doesn't matter; I will win it back at rouge-et-noir. I have had a wonderful run of luck, and I am going on to Baden from here. I should like to see you again. Where do these precious friends of M. de Lesseps live?'
  - 'No. 5, Rue Petite Sainte Jeanne d'Arc.'
- 'Would you like a canter to-morrow in the Allée des Poteaux, the Rotten Row of Paris? I know you can all ride. How Tita used to coax along that old gray pony of Uncle George's! If you will go, I can provide you with a passable mount. I have my own horses here.'
- 'I would rather not ride, and I have no habit; I am not travelling *en prince*, if you are! But if you like to drive I will go, as I have always had an ambition to see the Bois de Boulogne from four wheels, and I have not yet done so.'
  - 'I shall be delighted. I will call for you, and you can

bring along the petite sainte Jeanne, M. de Lesseps, and all the family.'

'You don't know what you are proposing,' said Olivia, laughing. 'You had better be contented with Jeanne.'

'Very well. We will give her a drive à l'Anglaise.'

'Which means, I suppose, on a very high drag, with four very fresh horses. I should prefer a less exciting expedition. I have some commissions to execute in the Rue de la Paix to-morrow. Suppose you pick me up somewhere, and let us have a quiet chat.'

It was decided that Orlando should meet her at the Arc de Triomphe at four next day.

But next day at four no Orlando was to be found.

'Some other engagement may have kept him,' said Olivia good-naturedly. 'Let us go home.'

'This is more bête than his ignorance,' candidly remarked Jeanne Bonchaud, who was more than a little disappointed at missing a drive with the handsome young Englishman, who had a reputation already in Parisian society. The sums of money he had lost during the three days' races at Dieppe had somehow become known, and his risky mode of recuperation marked him as the sharper's certain victim. Already the hungry instincts of social speculators scented his ruin, and nowhere on earth are the paving-stones on the road to Avernus smoother than in Paris.

Disappointed of her drive in the Bois, Olivia was fain to content herself with a long walk in the evening with her lover. As he was to leave by the mid-day train next day, it was not surprising that it should be late when they returned to the Bonchauds' house in the Rue Petite Sainte Jeanne d'Arc.

The moon hung over the tall houses opposite, and filtered in a misty twilight through the lime-trees.

Olivia turned on the steps to look back at the luminous loveliness.

"" How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!" she repeated.

As she spoke, a fiacre which had been slowly coming up the road stopped.

The very vehicle even, in the uncertain light, looked dissipated, and the horse which drew it was the typical 'cross between a clothes-horse and a night-mare.'

A young man descended, and approached somewhat unsteadily.

- 'Mille pardons!' he exclaimed. 'But you seem to know English. Could you kindly tell me if this street is called something Joan of Arc.'
  - 'Orlando, is that you?' said Olivia, horrified.
- 'I suppose so,' said Orlando hurriedly. 'It's lucky I met you. I could not recall the name of the street exactly, and I had forgotten the number and the name of the people you are staying with. I fancy I meant to have come earlier, but something prevented me. I hope Saint Jane is out. If so, I will just go back to the cab and bring up a friend I have there, a Mr. Rose, a capital fellow: he'll be Lord Harbard some day if he's spared.'
- 'I think you had better go back to your hotel at once, and call to-morrow—Jeanne is in to-night.'
- 'You don't think I am afraid of her? Fotheringay, you fetch up Rose. Or no, I'll go myself, and you give your arm to Olivia. This light dances in such a beastly way it's enough to make one giddy.'
- Mr. Fotheringay, however, left Olivia, and gave Orlando the benefit of his shadow to the cab.

The Hon. Bernard Rose declined to accompany his friend 'on such a plaguy fool's errand,' and after a sharp discussion Orlando stumbled into the cab, assuring him that he would never desert him. Without the preliminary of good-bye to Olivia or Mr. Fotheringay, the young men departed.

Olivia wrung her hands with grief and vexation.

Mr. Fotheringay soothed her by promising to see what had become of them to-morrow, before starting for Nice.

He fulfilled this promise by calling at the Grand Hotel and making inquiries.

'It is my belief,' he said sadly, when he returned to report on his investigations, 'that Carlyon is tobogganing down the road to ruin. He and Rose did not turn up at the hotel till four o'clock this morning, and he can give no account of how those six hours were spent. I really believe he does not know. He is very penitent now. I hope it may last. He says he shall leave Paris at once, and return to London instead of going to Baden. He implored me to beg your pardon, and I could not help pitying the fellow, though there seems to be something abject in making such a fool of yourself when you know what remorse it will cost you.'

'Poor boy! poor boy!' said Olivia dismally. 'What will become of him? Is this "seeing the world"?'

'It is a very serious state of things. What a thousand pities Mr. Williams did not leave that money to you and Tita! The best thing for him would be to drop what is left of it into the Seine. He will be wild till he has spent it all. Olive, I don't think we will try to land the two hundred thousand florin prize in the lottery, after all.'

'Then, you must think him a serious warning indeed! What shall I tell them at home?'

'That the sooner they forget him the better.'

## CHAPTER IX.

#### RENUNCIATION.

'What she now felt was less anger than a grave, settled condemnation of him. Better love, better regret, better yearnings, hopes and fears, than this terrible phase of feeling, about which you have the further pain of knowing that it must be the lasting one.'—Véra.

TITA'S room at the Gables formed an L above the porch and hall. A curtain, running on a rod, divided the sleeping compartment from the tiny sitting-room; but this was hung rather for effect than use, as it could only be drawn at night, all the light coming from the three-sided window at the porch end. This window commanded a view of the garden, with the meadows below, and beyond these the cliffs and a stretch of sea extending till cut off on one hand by the high commons, and on the other by the village and church steeple. A love of ventilation had confined the drapery to the partition and window curtains. The narrow iron bed stood bare-legged on a shining floor. Even the walls were bare, except for the book-shelves and a plain text in Old English letters above the bed's head: 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' An old mahogany secretary, discarded from the dining-room at the restoration, a leather sofa from the same quarter, and an odd table and chair, completed the furniture of the sunny corner in which Tita spent much of her time. She did not write here; capriciousness made it feel too solitary-

## RENUNCIATION

'So calm that it disturbs And vexes meditation with its strange And extreme stillness.'

But if she had a particularly delicious book to read she would bring it to this retreat and devour it from end to end. She demanded what she called 'humanity' in a book, and if she found it she became absorbed. She often lamented that when she touched the interest of a story she lost self-control. The sensation of need which she then experienced was largely physical, and resembled a lion's thirst for blood. The 'Heart of Midlothian,' 'Jane Eyre,' and the 'Scarlet Letter' she read from beginning to end without stopping. This must be considered a bad habit, though Mr. Smith could not resist doing the same with 'Jane Eyre,' or the Prince of Wales with 'Called Back,' and very likely it is a general weakness; but it unsettles the mind for other work, and it is not even a fair manner of reading, as it allows no time for digestion and assimilation.

Tita took in each idea as she read; but impressions so obtained could not be distinctly retained. It was as if two wheels revolved against each other, each cog fitting perfectly into its place as it passed, but producing nothing. And yet while she raced through the pages her sensitivity to what she read was so acute that she often noticed a slight slip of the writer which had escaped five or six revisions. For instance, she detected on the first reading that Thackeray uses the same simile, hastening the funeral when there has been a death in the house, twice within a few pages in 'Vanity Fair,' and calls old Mr. Sedley John in his prosperity, and Joseph when he comes to die, while, on the other hand, Mrs. Sedley is Mary when the bankruptcy happens, and Bessy when she is dead; that Blackmore tells us that the father of the ill-starred Alan Bandir lost his hearing by going about without his hat to seek his slaughtered son, while we have been informed before that that young man considered himself his cousin's guardian, because his father was too old and deaf to attend to matters of business; that the same writer calls the wife of Hezekiah Perkins (in the 'Maid of Sker') Hepzibah and Keziah, and in 'Erema' makes the old clerk say that his master's father had died of heart disease thirty years agone, when that master had said the day before that his father was spending a green and agreeable old age at Sevenoaks; and that even the precise Sir Walter Scott calls the Earl of Salisbury William and Thomas Longsword in the 'Talisman.' Such mistakes jarred on her mind, as they betrayed an incompleteness in the conception of plot altogether antagonistic to her ideas of true art. 'Ah, what the "glamour might" must be!' she would say with a sigh.

One afternoon in the early winter she had been sitting at her window, reading with this mingled sense of pain and pleasure the end of 'Adam Bede.' Consummate though the book was, and impregnated with 'humanity,' which was missing from George Eliot's later works, she was not perfectly content with the conclusion. It seemed to her that the author put Hetty Sorrel out of the way instead of facing the dilemma.

She was so absorbed in her summing-up that she did not notice the postman's whistle, and Bianca entered before she had speculated on the possibilities of the afternoon post.

'Here is a note for you from Olivia. Bring it down to us when you have read it. I am going down to read her letter to mother. It is very senseless of her to write twice by one post, wasting a second postage, and that after keeping us a week without any news.'

As soon as Bianca had closed the door behind her, Tita slowly opened her letter. She could not have said what instinct warned her that it contained bad news of Orlando, but she knew it. She felt a sudden oppression and giddiness, while her hands and feet trembled and grew cold.

She rose, walked hastily across the room, and locked the door. Then she returned to her place, and took up the open letter:

# 'My DEAR TITA,

'I am sorry that I said anything about Orlando in my letter to mother, as it cannot do any good; but my mind was full of it, and it would come out. Now, I may as well tell you the exact truth, and leave you to judge whether it will be wise to explain all to mother. He had certainly been drinking too much when he came here. was past ten when we met him at the door as we were returning from a walk. He went down to the cab to bring up a friend; but his friend would not come, and they quarrelled there in the street, and then he went off without the ceremony of taking leave of me. Fred went to the Grand Hotel next day to see what had become of him, and found him very penitent, as well he might be. What he and his friend did after leaving here is not very clear, but they got back to the hotel at four o'clock next morning. cannot write more, or I shall not be able to catch the post with this.'

Tita knew that Olivia made her trustee of the facts for her mother only to save her the pain of having it acknowledged that they were of more importance to her than to the rest of the family. Grieved as the others would be, this was her affair; the agony of disgrace was for her alone.

Whatever misgivings she might have had as to Orlando's career, she was quite unprepared for this blow, and perhaps the revolt produced in her mind was out of proportion to the offence. She was, as Selina called it, 'a great teetotaler.' One wonders how there can be degrees in total abstinence; but, any way, Tita was among the most earnest workers, and, let it be added, one of the most bigoted partisans, of the temperance cause. Yet she would sign no pledge and

take no badge. She said her love of temperance was beyond forms and symbols. She had two schemes for the advancement of the world's welfare, and one of them was the prohibition by law of the sale of intoxicating liquors, at which Utopian idea her temperance friends—strangers yet to even dreams of Local Option-laughed, saying such measures could not be enforced without producing rebellion. Tita was quite unconvinced by this argument, knowing full well that the sensitive so-called liberty of the subject is a figment of the imagination. Where does the liberty of the subject come in, for sooth, when one is compelled to pay one's rates and taxes? If the common safety and welfare are to be paramount, let us be logical and pay the price. Argue how we will, the fact remains that much of the misery and sin in the world is caused by drink. To say that it is the naturally criminal and depraved who give way to drunkenness does not remove our obligation. And how many a saddened soul knows that the insidious evil is not to be measured by the glaring, self-evident revelations of the police-court and newspaper!

Tita had brooded over this evil for years, none the less passionately that she had never so far been brought into personal contact with the weakness she wished to succour. Indeed, had she but known it, her enthusiasm was rooted rather in hatred of the sin than in sympathy with the sinner. And here she was brought face to face with the failing she had loathed with all the strength of her lofty nature.

She was stunned by the discovery. A physical faintness of heart came over her; now and then her consciousness wavered. She was not afraid of being ill—she had never had a day's illness in her life—but she remembered that she had locked the door, and she was glad of it. Let no one witness the utterness of her degradation.

In this indescribable moment of agony Tita shed no tears. For relief she merely paced unsteadily up and down the

room. Unable at last to do even this, she flung herself with arms outstretched upon her bed, in a voiceless, pulseless desolation. The nerves of her arms and legs were as hard and stiff as those of a dead hare which had given the greyhounds a spinning run.

She lay for some time in a stupor, without distinct thoughts or feelings, only a heavy misery lying on her heart.

At last there came a gentle tap at the door, and Bianca asked: 'Are you ready for tea?'

Tita passed her hand across her forehead, opened her eyes, and said: 'Yes.'

There was no escape from the ordeal. The meal was a more ceremonious one than its name would imply, as it did duty for dinner when they were alone.

She rose stiffly from her bed, and in doing so her eyes fell, as they had done a thousand times before, on the text: 'Underneath are the everlasting arms.'

She walked calmly down to the dining-room, and took her place at the table.

There was a peculiarity about Tita's eyes which medical men might be able to explain, but I cannot. When she was intensely moved there came a curious light into them. It did not seem to be reflected from without, sparkling in smiles or glancing in tears. It lay in luminous pools, and, look as long and closely as you might, it seemed that the light came from within.

To those accustomed to her impassive face, those eyes were as two windows. And now they looked through them, and saw that there had been an earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire.

Neither Mrs. Storck nor Bianca spoke, but the former passed Olivia's letter across to her.

It was not long, and Tita read it while Bianca poured the tea. The only mention of Orlando was in the sentence:

'We were at the races at Longchamps, and there saw Orlando; I am afraid he is going on very badly.'

Little as that sentence expressed, it had given Mrs. Storck a headache, and though it left Bianca perfectly crisp, she knew too well to ask for Olivia's note to Tita.

As Tita folded and returned the letter to her mother, she said casually: 'I wonder if Jeanne still wears shoes with Louis Quatorze heels.'

Mrs. Storck and Bianca looked at one another. They understood perfectly that Orlando's name was not to be mentioned among them.

And Tita kept up her part for the evening without flinching, but she was thankful when prayers were over and the lights put out.

A fire had been lit in her room during her absence, and she gave a sinister smile as she saw the flames dancingly reflected on the polished floor, though she said: 'Darling mother!'

Once again she locked the door, and, going straight to the old secretary, she unlocked the writing-drawer, and took out a packet of papers. She brought the table to the side of the fireplace, and sat down before it. The packet contained several letters, photographs of notabilities and beautiful places, and little treasured relics 'of no value except to the owner.'

Tita deliberately read each letter before she burnt it, beginning with a characteristic scrawl from school, running, I want your riddle-book to show some fellows, and ending with one written just before Mr. Williams' death, in which —with perfect confidence that what amused him would interest her—Orlando told her that he had dreamt that Bianca was going to marry Mr. Briggs, and came up to London to tell him, dressed in a pink print gown trimmed with black flowers—'a very swagger frock, which somehow was going to be kept on till the wedding!'

It may seem strange, but Tita smiled as she read many of those letters. Nevertheless, she burnt each one separately, and watched it whirl up the chimney in little black flakes.

The photographs took longer burning, and she moved to the bookcase, and took down all the books he had given her, and tore them up that they might burn the more easily.

By this time it was late, and every sound in the house had long ago died out.

She unlocked the door and slipped downstairs, and made a pilgrimage of the rooms, collecting every trifle he had ever given her.

Alone in the middle of the night, she blushed to find how many treasures she had accumulated.

She returned as noiselessly as she had come, and stirring the fire into a blaze, she cast in everything with an unfaltering hand.

She sat watching until every particle was destroyed, and then she poked until there was nothing left but a heap of gray ashes.

Then she went to the secretary, and took out an inkstand and a leather-bound book. This was her diary, which we have to thank for all the information in these pages which seems to come from an invisible source.

She began to write in the same phenomenal calmness which had supported her through the evening, and nothing can give such a true insight into her feelings as her own words.

"I must have been more than a common sinner to have suffered so much!" said a friend of mine, when trouble upon trouble came to darken the evening of a saddened life. What have I done to deserve this last horrible stroke of fate? Wherein have I sinned that this extremest penalty should pursue me? One in whom I trusted much has failed me, has failed his better nature and his God. How

is it possible that anyone with whom I have touched sympathies can have fallen away so? My heart is not breaking, my tears are not flowing; it is degradation too horrible to be realized at once. When I think of our beautiful, bright boy, with his radiant consciousness, getting the most possible enjoyment out of life, thinking of endless little things to make our dull lives brighter, affectionate, loyal, truthful, sensible, then my heart aches; but when I think of him as he is now, idle, unfeeling, thriftless, a drunkard, I am stone. I clung to him, to our ideal, through good report and ill. I said malice invented any stories to his discredit. I did wish for a little more assurance, but I did not falter. And here is the end of it! Is there no one in whom one can trust? Is there no one who is both charming and good? Thousands, I suppose—somewhere! . . . It is no good to argue about it. It is gradually dawning upon me that this is no difficulty for one's reason to combat. It is no use to say, "He is penitent." He is fallen—fallen for ever; and to me lost—lost! I said, Yes, he is selfish; it is the egotism of youth, young manhood. Yes, he is idle; it is the revolt of an exquisite taste against pleasureless effort. Yet it is not himself, Self, he is keeping steadily before his eyes. It is nothing! Drifting hopelessly, helplessly. . . . I will pray for you till the end of the world. It is all I have left. You I cannot touch, but God's ears are ever open. . . . I will repent. It is my pride. This thing I said could not happen to me. I could not love and the thing I love drop to unworthiness. I do repent, but never can my idol-a woman may have such an idol and sin not - be set up again. My heart is breaking, after all. Think of himnoisy, quarrelsome, incapable. It is well he should be penitent. But what is the good of penitence? It is not a matter for forgiveness; it is a revelation. To me he must be a dead thing, a wandering memory. Yet he comes back to me, that other Orlando, a splendid piece of manhood. How utterly he forgets that that glorious body of his is the temple of God!'

In another entry she writes:

'I suppose I shall come out of this dust-and-ashes-allthat-is stage. Everything just now is full of pain for me; it must be so for some time—perhaps always. Wherever I turn I see tokens of the "loved once" of the past. get away from it. I nearly wanted to annihilate all the thing, but it could not be done in an hour. You may burn your letters, you may wrap yourself round in utter silence. There are remembrances that will not die, there are allusions which must be faced. That one you have trusted should give way to despicable weakness does not blot out the past. Then your system of annihilation has its penalties. notice your treasured relics doubly when the sight seems to say, "I must die." . . . A few years and all this will be a decaying memory of the past. Yet somehow I don't feel as if I had any more right to visit for offences committed in a phase of will-madness than I should have to resent a blow struck in the delirium of fever. What a hopeless tangle of feeling! I said as I burnt my letters that it was a dead thing I was burning; though as the flames curled up and flickered a moment, reflected in my heart, it did seem like burning a living thing. And so useless a sacrifice! I am always coming across something that I have overlooked, which reminds me of nothing else but "I am not so easily killed!"

> "Cast no least thing thou loved'st once away, Since yet perchance thine eyes shall see the day."

My eyes can never "see the day," only the "darkness which may be felt."

There are several points to be noticed about this entry. That allusion to will-madness looks like relenting. The curious expression about her first sweeping resolution—'I

nearly wanted to annihilate all the thing '—may have been a slip of the pen. She might have meant to write, "I nearly annihilated all the thing," or, "I wanted to annihilate all the thing"; but it was never altered, and really looks as if at the very time she was so resolute she knew she was only scotching her Hydra.

A late passage may throw some light on what she calls 'a hopeless tangle of feeling.'

'I am doubtful how much of this wished-for renunciation is pride. It does seem cruel and wicked, and yet right. Why halt ye between two opinions? Not because I do not know on which side God is-though I do not-but because I will not "throw away" my precious feelings; and yet reason, resolve, plan as I will, I cannot cast a friend out of my heart so easily. There is no possible way in which I can express my displeasure. I could not send back a few trivial remembrances, though I have "long longed to redeliver" them-I, "fine of the fine, shy of the shy." But I would not if I could. I have said before this last fever-fit, "It is perdition to anyone of his temperament to feel himself deserted." For that reason I cannot wrench away my friendship, however unworthy he may be. And is my friendship such a treasure? only for the elect! Only if I could see him face to face and say, "You have let yourself drift across the Rubicon, you are nothing to me till you have washed yourself clean in the red flood of Christ's blood." That would be right, that would be dealing truly. But it is out of the question.'

We see that Tita has advanced so far as to see that the will-madness is a fever-fit!

Again she writes:

'Our feelings for ever ebb, for ever flow. I find myself drifting sometimes on a sea of memories to a sort of dreamland, from which I am recalled by the flaring across my mind of the word "disgrace." And then, after being torn

by an intolerable pride, myself tells myself that I have no right to let such acute self-consciousness influence me. I have wrapped myself up in such a vesture of high morality and would-be refinement that the idea of cherishing the memory of anyone who has fallen out of my sublime order is intolerable, it is disgrace.'

Tita calls herself 'myself' in several places, thus justly acknowledging—though probably ignorant of Plato's theory—a dual personality, such as most people have, though few but artists consciously live a double life, and they can rarely tell where 'me' verges into 'myself.'

Was it Tita or herself who finished off the entry?

'My life drifts along as cheerfully as ever. Some day when I have crystallized I mean to be a great writer, and Bianca and I will be two merry old maids in a few years. But I don't feel very merry now. . . . So we go on from day to day. "I sleep, but my heart waketh." (How could anyone who had about a thousand wives write the Canticles?)'

## CHAPTER X.

ART.

'The swan divinely singeth, As with her last farewell to life Up to the fields of air she springeth.

'Ah, how like us! Through the world,
Still and mute we move along,
Until the death-wound in the true heart
Gives us voice and gives us song!'
MRS. W. P. O'NEILL. (From the German.)

It may seem that Tita was more in love with Love than with Orlando, and that the next 'splendid piece of manhood' which offered itself would help her to consummate her renunciation far better than her principles had done.

It may seem also that Olivia and Mr. Fotheringay were acting an unfair part in reporting Orlando's backsliding in such unvarnished plainness to Tita.

In a mild way—though willing to do his duty by him—Mr. Fotheringay disliked Orlando. Orlando was neither steady nor clever, while Mr. Fotheringay was conscious of being both, and yet circumstances fretted the soul of the briefless barrister while the ne'er-do-well won all along the line, and to lend exasperation to the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune (that was exactly the name for her), the women who should have known better maintained an insufferably tolerant front towards the mauvais sujet. Without any conscious malice, Mr. Fotheringay saw his

opportunity to readjust their judgment, and he meant to use it. So he advised Olivia, as Orlando was evidently a hopeless case, to let Tita know it, and not waste her youth and talents in sighing for a young man who was certain sooner or later to bring himself to ruin. Olivia accordingly wrote the simple truth, not without some vacillation and regret.

The effect upon Tita could only be partly gathered from her diary, for she made no mention of the sleepless nights and blinding tears, which she felt it to be a weakness to experience, much more to chronicle. It was a complete upsetting of the whole fabric of her regard for Orlando. Her mind at once condemned him, and she saw that his character was different from what she had taken it to be. There is no sadder experience in the world than this. the first flush we do not realize that the fault is in a great measure our own; that we have invested our idol with qualities from our own imagination, and that it is no other thing than it was before, only the scales have fallen from our eyes. Who has not known how once, twice, many times in our lives those deep brown eyes, which have been full of meaning and wonder for us, have become empty and green? the hand which could thrill us with a subtle touch has become four fingers and a thumb! Yet let but the wheel revolve again, and the empty green eyes are deep and full of meaning, and the hand once more thrills us with its subtle touch. Who can define the real and the imaginary? who can say what exists besides our own thoughts? Alas! such philosophic speculations do not cure the heartache. let alone the toothache. Tita, though she recognised the truth that Olivia's story was a revelation, and not a matter for forgiveness, let all the waves and billows of disappointment and regret go over her.

She had gone through much during those months of silence and uncertainty, and already knew that she had

miscalculated in handing over to Orlando the fortune which had been intended for herself. But that she never for an instant regretted. She had set him free, and was free herself. Common-sense was never Tita's distinguishing characteristic. She believed devoutly in a larger wisdom than common-sense. In fact, that belief was at the bottom of her character and career. Now, when she was trying to lay the ghost of her dead passion, hardly knowing if such feeling had been love at all, she turned with devotion to the other possibilities of her life. Love and Life are short, but Art is long. 'The restless, unsatisfied longing' was gone. Perhaps the disappointment and regret were crystallizing her thoughts and feelings. Disturbing influences at any rate were at rest.

So again she took up her parable.

It will easily be understood that her last experience had by no means weaned her mind from its prejudice in favour of temperance. Her 'itch to choose what grates upon the sense' was modified, not cured. She was now at the critical period in the mind's history, which is as full of interest as the corresponding point in the history of the feelings, 'where the brook and river meet.' The glorious enthusiasm of youth, which has much of inspiration in it, met the ripe judgment of maturity. Of the world, so called, she knew nothing; but being a keen observer, she knew much of human nature, and had a peculiar rightness of judgment. It may seem that in the only critical choice she had had to make she had made a vast and irretrievable mistake. look more closely. For her the mere comfort of £4,000 or  $f_{5,000}$  a year had no temptations. To have suitable food and clothes and leisure in which to work out her thoughts was the bourn of her worldly ambition. Had she kept the money and married Orlando, she would have been haunted by the suspicion that he might have married her for her money, or, rather, what he would have regarded as his own. Had she not married him, she would have felt that the money had been a barrier between them. In any case, her life would have been spoiled. She had miscalculated indeed, for there had undeniably been a hope in her heart that Orlando, rich and free, would consummate her happiness by wooing her absolutely for herself. But life was better with no love at all than with a dwarfed or maimed service. There was work in the world to be done, and she was not a poor-spirited wretch to be crushed by her first disappoint-Her 'noble nature' came out 'conqueror in the ment. strife.' She was not rendered in the least sour or gloomy by her experience. She was happy because, whatever there was to regret in the past, it had not been the course of her own actions. If love was gone, let it go; if it was still to come, let it come. Her work henceforth should be to strengthen the veins of virtue. She did not look about her for some 'mission.' To be a hospital nurse or a woman'srights lecturer did not occur to her. Advanced as all her views were, she objected to committing herself to any scheme or party. Her taste was for literature, and there would she find the outlet for the instincts and aspirations for ever at work in her brain, 'beating up against the wind.'

Tita was of 'tempest-loving kind,' inasmuch as a sense of conflict was always present in her mind, brooded over by an inarticulate hope that good would be the final goal of ill. There were evils to be fought; she would fight them.

One of her two schemes for the advancement of the world's welfare was staying the drink-plague by law, the other was the raising of the moral perception of the age. She had an utter loathing and hatred of everything consciously and wilfully coarse, low, weak, and cruel. The position of illegitimate children had aroused her intense sympathy, regarding them as she did as the victims of all these evils. In one of her books she wrote:

'I never remember to have read or heard, in history or

fiction, argument or ordinary conversation, one word of pity for the victims of a most unjust system. We pile poverty, ignominy, anguish, on the helpless who have not done the sin; we build penitentiaries for the fallen, and coax them back into the road of respectability; we are very tender over the innocence of the tempted; but who thinks of the stigma resting on the victims? Take civic rights from the sinful, the weak. Make immorality a crime, or smooth the thorny path its victims tread.'

She rarely spoke on the subject—it was not a conventional topic of conversation, and hers was not a conventional view of the subject—but she had a burning sense of the injustice of it all deep down in her heart, and when she gave expression to her feelings, they came out in words of fire. All her trouble as to how she should write was gone. In answer to the question, 'How came you to write "Red Wine"?' asked by a well-known critic, she replied: 'I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, "Write."'

Sympathy was her inspiration, and she told the story of Gilbert Cardinas with a force and directness which made both the ears of him that heard to tingle. It has since been questioned whether Cardinas was drawn from life, or was merely a creation of her fancy. It may safely be said that, though the character was not drawn from any one person, all the qualities and feelings with which he was invested really came under Tita's notice. There were many such cases as his which had come within her personal knowledge and roused her righteous wrath, and made her long to 'pile poverty, ignominy, anguish,' on the guilty. Her views were always met with the dead wall we call 'common-sense.' She was told of two evils we must choose the least. Legislation could not make us sober, legislation could not make us moral. That wall of common-sense is the rampart of a spiritual Jericho. Shall we wait for the trump of doom to shatter 'the Canaanites' wall'? As to choosing the least

of two evils, why countenance evil at all? 'It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.' Let us not say: 'Offences come; woe to him to whom they come.' Let the right back bear the burden. Our lowest instincts were given us to be exterminated by our higher ones; those who indulge their worst passions are criminals. The plea of expediency is a disgrace to Christianity. Ungovernable passions! There are no such things. The Spartans existed on black broth, and made a very respectable figure on it, too. Until it has been tried, let no one say that legislation cannot make us temperate. The man who has not a penny in his pocket can forego his pint of beer. The child whose father does not regard him seriously can slink round a corner, and say to himself in the dark: 'I am as well as other people.' Oh yes, endurance is a very possible thing.

It was thus Tita argued, and with sympathies aflame she set about the world's regeneration.

It has been said, and it is a good half-truth, that novelists should have no purpose in writing; their sole mission is to amuse. The novel with a definite object is certainly not the highest type. 'Bleak House' and 'Hard Cash' will not stand comparison as works of art with 'Vanity Fair' and 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' but all true art aims at ennobling by a representation of what is true. In music, in painting, in poetry, it is all the same. Why should the novelist take his stand on a lower level? Dr. Shorthouse, the great master of his school, has demonstrated that the highest spiritual phenomena come within the story-teller's province, and it is recognised in these days that our psychical and physical lives are mysteriously blended, that the good in us is for ever 'beating up against the wind' (to quote again the poet, whose views are always just).

This brings us back to Tita, whose intense sympathy enabled her to see the very pulse of the machine.

And while she kept before her a great purpose, she neglected no care which could make her work perfect, remembering the well-worn but little heeded phrase of Michael Angelo's: 'Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle.' Much has been said about method in writing, and it has been hinted that the less we know about it the better; familiarity breeds contempt. This man writes when the spirit moves him; that man writes ten pages a day whether the spirit moves him or not. (And it is said—but Tita luckily did not know this—that one romancer can never write at all till he has swallowed a certain quantity of whisky; then the spirit moves him.) One man paints his foreground with his palette-knife, another gets in the curve of his waves with his thumb-nail. So it must ever be till the finite shall have put on infinity.

The story goes that an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a German had once to write an essay on the camel. The Englishman at once rushed off to the desert, there to study the subject face to face. The Frenchman ran to the nearest library, and read up all the books bearing on the matter. The German retired to his study, and evolved the whole thing from his inner consciousness.

There is much to be said in favour of all three methods. Of course, it is of great importance that what is written should be true. It is of great interest to know what others have said and thought on the subject, but there is a sort of reality to be aimed at which a writer must have worked out for himself. Mrs. Gaskell tells us that when Charlotte Brontë had to describe anything which had not come within her personal experience, she thought over it at night before going to sleep, sometimes for weeks together, and at last she would wake up one morning perfectly acquainted with the matter. Mrs. Gaskell adds that she cannot explain this psychologically, but she knows 'it must have been so, because she said it.' It is a curious process, and hard to

understand; but there can be no doubt that the mind, by dwelling on certain facts and their probable relation to one another, evolves a reality. Remember, Coleridge had never been within the tropics when he wrote 'The Ancient Mariner,' nor Kingsley when he wrote 'Westward Ho!'

Tita, if she had to deal with a subject on which she was uninformed, gathered all the facts available bearing on it, and worked out a probable whole, cementing it with her own intelligence. She may have benefited - and many others!-by the fact that other people knew even less than herself on the matter. Requiring to give an account of a shipwreck in one of her short stories, she went to the fishermen, and gleaned all the facts she could; she also cut from the newspapers every scrap which might be of use, and then she shut herself up to live over the whole scene, and afterwards she was able to call up the necessary emotions in the reader's mind as distinctly as if she had been through the peril and adventure she described. This ability to realize and portray scenes in which she had taken no part lent to her writing that air of probability which was one of its chief charms. There was no trickery in this. She did not send her characters round the world in eighty days. Indeed, she did not see the necessity for sending them round the world at all, but drew her inspiration from everyday life. Do you not think that what made so many artists paint the Madonna and Child, and all the world appreciate, was the 'humanity' of the subject? To show the divine in the commonplace is the highest motive of an artist.

Tita first, then, raised her plot on a high motive, going no further for her materials than the seashore or the workshop. Then she let the details grow up in her mind as facts, fitting into the foundation of her story. As soon as her ideas had taken distinct and articulate form, she wrote as inspiration came to her, regarding this first utterance only as the bare walls of a temple, which must be chiselled and

polished and plastered by the after-light of judgment. Very rarely had she to pull down her masonry; but as she verified, wherever possible, every quotation she made, enlightened every obscure passage, even pondered over and perfected her punctuation, just as Michael Angelo may have softened this feature and brought out this muscle, it is certain that the conception and writing of her stories was little more than half the battle.

She often asked her sisters for advice, but generally followed her own instincts in the end. Olivia's ideas were all in a different key from her own, and Bianca had very little taste for literature.

She sometimes read aloud passages from the story she was writing, to see if she was keeping in touch with her audience.

Both girls were interested in 'Red Wine,' but Bianca thought there was too much love in it, and Olivia too much philosophy.

- 'Behold, you, who were to have been to literature what Mr. Ruskin is to art, have become merely the apostle of love,' said Bianca.
- 'Don't sneer at love because you have no heart yourself,' retorted Olivia. 'I am sure Tita has not overdone it. The book will be far too serious as it is. It would have been better to put all those moral reflections into a tract and sell them separately. Nothing pays like a religious book, a sort of patent medicine for the soul, unless it may be a quack pill. But soothing syrup, either for the spirit or the body, should be served up alone; don't make a negus of it.'
- 'Soothing syrup!' exclaimed Tita. 'Say an emetic or a blister.'

She was able to turn with a smile from these sharp critics. They were interested; that was what she wanted to be sure of. They might find what faults they would, and she would try to profit by their remarks. Miss Cartwright's complaint

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that there was no incident in her writing had not been without effect, though she always maintained that incident was of secondary importance. To draw life truly was the essential; incidents were but the fortuitous turns of circumstance.

In this state of mental calm Tita continued through the winter, and the spring found her with the completed manuscript of a powerful novel, which, if it did not come up to her own severe ideal, yet contained, she believed, a good deal that was new and something that was good.

# CHAPTER XI.

## THE 'DELICATE LIFE.'

'When it shall please God to bring thee to man's estate, use great providence and circumspection in choosing thy wife. For from thence will spring all thy future good or evil.'—LORD BURLEIGH.

While Tita was thus fighting down 'with tears and suppression of sighs' the womanly tenderness in her heart, Orlando was pursuing his course with very little thought for the future, and none at all for the past. He said to himself that life had been pleasureless and uncongenial to him till fate had placed him in a position to follow the natural bent of his disposition. To emphasize the difference between his present situation and his limited and colourless youth was the most definite aim he kept before him. If—which very rarely happened—circumstances thrust the associations of his boyhood on his memory, as in the case of his meeting with Olivia, his transient interest rushed back to Tita; but the impulse was like a little pebble dropped in a mill-pond, and other feelings flooded over, and there was no trace left.

His mode of life was no more selfish than that of the people around him. His fastidious taste was always at the command of his friends. 'Carlyon is immense at suggesting' was the verdict of those whose palpitating ambitions towards high art occasionally outran their capabilities. More cynical acquaintances said he was an artist in every-

thing except the capacity for production. He decorated and furnished his rooms in town with fervid interest, suggesting the design for the moulded frieze, and giving hints as to the dye of the curtains. He was enthusiastic in the movement we might call the Revival of Taste, and cared less for the ridicule of the Philistines than for the biting of gnats, to which, indeed, he was peculiarly sensitive!

Yet he was vaguely aware that his experience was unsatisfying. As a career, spending his money in the pursuit of pleasure fell short of his expectations, and that without his experiencing the rebuffs which often temper the success of the social aspirant with a little wholesome alloy. Society was kind to him, and he shared fully in the gaieties of a brilliant London season. He was an especial favourite at certain houses where his 'open-fistedness' was as agreeable to the men as his æsthetic taste to the women. And nowhere was he more welcome than at Lady Vandemon's perfect reunions. He would probably have decided, if he had thought of the matter at all, that the worship of the beautiful was the bond of sympathy which drew him so often to the pretty house off Park Lane—beauty in the concrete as well as in the abstract.

Lady Vandemon, one of the first to adopt the idea of 'higher culture' as an article of faith into a very mixed creed, had reigned only a few years before as a beauty and an heiress, and now she had draped the ample mantle, which her fair shoulders had borne successfully, on the still fairer form of her niece, Miss Gladys Bullion, the daughter of the well-known banker.

Lady Vandemon's last reception has arrived. Gladys, as fresh and ingenuous-looking as when the season opened, stands under the Chinese lanterns which swing among the palms in the conservatory. She is dressed in a clinging robe of palest sea-green. No outrageous puffs and slash-

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ings hide the perfect proportions of her figure. She has adopted that modification of the æsthetic idea which exhibits, or rather suggests, the matchless excellence of her form. She is not 'one of those fortunate beings who can make a girdle of their garter.' She is rather like a young goddess, for whom art has done nothing but supply a perfectly-fitting sheath.

Beside her stands Orlando, another sensation of the season. Her beauty is matched by his wealth: half a million at least, or so everybody says. He is dressed in ordinary evening clothes, except that from his neck depends a silk handkerchief striped in two peculiar shades of blue-purple, which supports a sprained wrist.

The eyes of Miss Bullion rest sympathetically on this elaborate trifle.

'So you are really going out of town to-morrow? How I envy you! I have to wait a whole fortnight for papa; then we go to Ostend, while you go to the North. I hope you will be careful not to hurt your arm in your wanderings.'

'It is too good of you to think of it'—exchange of glances—'but see, I can move my hand quite easily. It is only a little rest I need. I have not quite decided to leave tomorrow. I only told Lady Vandemon that I might go. Don't you think we rush about too much?'

Miss Bullion looks responsively out of her large brown eyes, but she says with an air of debating the point:

'You are bitten with Canon Cartwright's philosophy. We shall have you and Aunt Carry quitting the old-gold and sage-green world you have so lately created, and joining your little friend Janet in a mission to the unwashed of Bethnal Green.'

'First, let me say that Miss Cartwright does not honour me with any particular friendship, but is the friend of my friends; and then I may add that, though I admire and approve of the movement for looking into the condition of the East-End poor, yet the loathsomeness of the work would turn me back if the Whitechapel road led straight to Paradise. I have no desire to leave "the world," but it does seem to me that we get very little real happiness by our running to and fro. But I see you do not agree with me; you are not tired with life's endless toil and endeavour.'

There is suggestion of a positive craving for honeysuckle and nightingales, and brown bread and May dew, and all things primitive and rustic, in Miss Bullion's eyes; but she says with a sigh: 'We are still in the world. I must go back to Aunt Carry, or I shall be missed.'

She looks deliciously simple in her clinging dress, her large eyes shaded by her soft brown hair, as she moves towards the curtained doorway which lets in light and music.

'Stay one moment!'

# ' DEAREST OLIVIA.

'Now I think I have a piece of news that will interest you, though you don't deserve to be told it, as you were so unsympathetic about the East-End Mission. But I am of a naturally forgiving and charitable disposition (though aunt does not think so). So I will tell you at once, and not tantalize you at all. Of course it is about your friend, Orlando Carlyon: he says he is your cousin, but I don't believe it. However, as it happens, that is neither here nor there. Now to the point. I think the pace he has been living these last two years is beginning to tell on his temperament, so that he is getting almost inclined to be something like serious. In fact, I think if the right influence were brought to bear-but never mind that, it is not what is good for him he is looking out for, but what suits his taste. At this moment that happens to be the handsomest wife in London. And he has aimed pretty high for such a young one. Miss Gladys Bullion is undeniably the beauty this year, and Lady Vandemon, though ready to put her hand to every good movement, is-I must say it in all charity—one of the cleverest and most ambitious women in society. I cannot quite understand her allowing Gladys to go so cheaply, unless that excessively well-conducted young lady showed some tendency to kick over the traces in private, or else they believe the stories of Mr. Carlyon's fabulous fortune, which (bother the stops! punctuation is the thief of time), unless your uncle was a Crœsus indeed, is surveyed through very powerful magnifying glasses, whereas in reality it is my private opinion that fortune is by no means growing larger. I don't think Miss Bullion will have much money, though she comes of a rich family, for her brother is a complete spendthrift. He is detestable. I don't say this because he nicknamed me Puss-in-Blue-Stockings, but entirely because he has not a virtue. If he stopped at that he would be something like his sister, but he is a mass of vices, while she has not a fault-at least, not one to be discovered by a casual but observing friend. She is the most cold-blooded girl I ever saw, but that cannot exactly be called a fault. Whether she will really make Mr. Carlyon happy remains to be proved. He is magnificently good-tempered, and she certainly admires him. You can tell Tita, whom I used to consider a favourite of his, that he has been the hardest run after of any of the second-rate prizes this season. It is wonderful to me that he has escaped so long; but I suppose before he had his money he was out of the way of temptation, and since the very embarras de richesses in the way of eligible young ladies puzzles the will. Some people think him the bestlooking man about, while others sneeringly call him the You will think, with aunt, that my Perpetual Youth. French morals incline me to a good deal of small talk, but it is entirely the misfortune of my position. Then the very fact that I have dedicated my life to good works creates a sort of safety for me in what you might call touching the nettle, so I glean all the gossip I can, and moralize the spectacle for the benefit of my friends. That is how I am able delicately to hint at the true state of affairs where some people would be able only to give you the bald details. However, I had the fact of Mr. Carlyon's engagement from himself. He called the day before he left London for Ostend, I believe expressly to tell me about it, no doubt that I might pass it on to you. He was not very gay over it, but evidently regarded it as a happy triumph. I do hope it will end well, for I like him very much, notwithstanding his faults, and so does my father, who says his faults are not so much failings as fallings. They are not to be married till the spring. When I know what people say about it, I will write again and tell you.

'Yours ever faithfully,

'JANET CARTWRIGHT.'

The summer is dead.

A sweet, sickly odour of decaying leaves hangs heavily in the air, and steals in through the half-open windows. The rain cuts down across the gray sky in a sheet of silver threads, blurring out the view of meadow and moorland, and making a blank horizon of the garden wall. The tall sunflowers stand dripping with their large battered leaves waving like ragged banners. 'Heavily hangs the hollyhock, heavily hangs the tiger lily.' Brown pools lie on the gravel paths. The sodden rose-leaves moulder on the sodden earth. The summer is dead.

Tita is sitting in the study at work on the early chapters of 'Asphodels,' the most popular of her novels. She is unconscious of the warring elements without. She notices the helpless leaves whirled up and down in the pitiless wind. She hears the creaking of the ilex boughs. But these things affect without disturbing her. She has crystallized at last.

In her mind the fluttering, ecstatic thoughts are about to take form. Power is with her in the storm.

The door opens, and Olivia comes quietly in.

She glances at Tita inquiringly. The small golden head is bent over a sheet of foolscap, and the fine little fingers hold a pencil.

Olivia goes to the bookshelves and takes down a book—which she opens in the middle—and sits down. Presently she shuts the book and sits thinking. Then she rises and returns the volume to its place, and comes to the window and stands looking out at the sodden world.

It has stopped raining, and the flowers are raising their draggled heads. She puts down the window to its fullest extent. She is in a state of unendurable excitement, and is dying to discuss the information her friend has given her with her mother and Bianca, but feels that she is bound in honour first to see how Tita will take it. Orlando's name has not been mentioned among them for months—never, she thinks, since her return from Paris. How will Tita take this sudden awakening?

Tita, whose sensibility is growing daily acuter, is more disturbed by the anxious tumult in Olivia's mind than she has been by the storm which has rattled the window-frame.

She drops her pencil and looks up from the unfinished page.

'What is it?' she asks.

Olivia unclasps her hands from behind her shapely figure, and replies hastily: 'Orlando is going to be married.'

'Indeed,' says Tita composedly; 'it is so much the best thing he could do that I wonder at it.'

Olivia looks at her curiously. She thinks in her heart that Tita is 'queer.'

But nothing is simpler than the explanation of her composure. It is easy to Tita to be cheerful, it is easy to her to be calm. Pride helps her not only to seem, but to be

both. But it is impossible to her either to be or to seem candid on the subject of Orlando. Perhaps that, too, is pride, or it may be fineness of the fine. But while 'she never told her love,' the memory of Orlando, though at first she tried to stifle it, has been as present to her as the light of day—more so, for when has it been more present than when 'darkness falls from the wings of night'? and the silence and the twilight say, Remember! She had laughed in her heart-whole girlhood at the broken heart which found the breeze upon the sunny hill, the billows of the sea, forbid it to forget; but just the same thing is happening to her. There is the memory lying perhaps at rest in the heart, but ready to awake at the shadow of a cloud or a sigh of the wind.

There is no harsh revolution in Tita's mind at Olivia's intelligence. It fits in perfectly in the sequence of her own ideas. You cannot walk up the roof of a house, but you can attain fifty times the altitude—even if you have the asthma—by taking it at an easy incline. Olivia has imagined that she has been offering a very stiff bank to Tita, while in reality Tita has been climbing up the slope very gradually and imperceptibly these two years since Orlando exclaimed: 'Now I will see the world!'

She is not even ruffled by this anticlimax. If she is grieved at all, it is at Olivia's wounded surprise.

'I have two or three lines to write,' she says kindly. 'Then let us go for a walk. See, the clouds are breaking up over the medlar-tree; it will be a glorious afternoon. We will get mother to give us some soup for Molly Fuller, and you can tell me all the news on the way.'

But what does Tita do when the door closes on Olivia?

She glides across the room to the mirror over the mantelpiece, and passes her finger along certain shallow creases in her face.

As she returns to the writing-table she wrings her hands

till every joint cracks. But she throws the long coils of hair back over her shoulders, and the pencil flies across the page.

Tita has the softest heart, but the hardest mind.

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Olivia no sooner found herself free from the scene, than she rushed off to Bianca.

Bianca anxiously suspended her sewing at the sight of Olivia's excited face, and eagerly read the letter.

It is never well to bring ill news, says the proverb, and the first thing the girls did was to find fault with Miss Cartwright.

- 'She may talk lightly of her French morals,' said Olivia, 'but she really is extremely frivolous, and I see now with regret that Madame Regnier's school did develop any latent taste for persiflage in the pupils.'
- 'That is quite true,' said Bianca. 'I have wished sometimes that you and I had not been sent there. Tita, you see, never says any of those sharp things which I feel an irresistible temptation to utter. And why should it be but that she went to Daventry Hall instead of to Paris? Janet never was a favourite of mine, but I should have thought she would have written more seriously on such an important subject.'
- 'It is the way she has been brought up. Between the fashionable clericalism of her father and the false literary taste of her aunt it is no wonder she should be worldly-minded. But I cannot have you abuse her. With all her cynicism, she is the most generous girl I know, and really clever, too. What do you think she means by saying Orlando's faults are not so much failings as fallings?'
- 'If it is anything but a catch-phrase, I suppose she means that his unsteady walk in life is rather like that of the child than the cripple. But if you have been to Tita, what does she say?'

- 'When I told her Orlando was going to be married, she calmly said it was the best thing he could do. You never can surprise Tita. I don't understand it at all. She really cannot be so all-wise and far-seeing that she knows everything that is going to happen. It was the same about Uncle George's will, if you remember.'
- 'Papa was just like it, you know. I suppose it is intellect. He was more upset at finding he had misunderstood a line of Shakespeare than at grandfather's leaving us without a penny.'
- 'Yes; I remember how calmly he took all Aunt Margery's "I told you so's." I believe when that dreadful explosion came he must have said to himself: "I thought it would happen." Tita has just the same way—one does not know whether it is wisdom or childishness. Orlando I shall make no attempt to understand; I can say from the bottom of my heart I wish he may be happy.'

## CHAPTER XII.

#### HEART OF OAK.

'I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.'

MR. FOTHERINGAY'S estimate of the litigiousness of his relations proved just.

The big quarrel culminated in an action for libel, and he was retained by the aggrieved party to oppose Sir Coke Lyttleton, one of the brightest lights in the legal firmament. The case was exactly suited to the young barrister's abilities. There was no room for doubt as to the defamatory statement having been made; the only question for the judge and jury was whether there had been any malice, and if so what damages plaintiff was thereby entitled to.

In opening the case, counsel had to appeal to an adverse judge and an apathetic jury, but, by his adroit management and ruthless exposure of the petty spitefulness of the defendant, he soon made out a good case for his client. His cross-examination of the witnesses was particularly effective, and the jury had little hesitation in assessing the damages at £4,000.

This was indeed a brilliant stroke of fortune for so young a man, and henceforth his career was secure. Marriage was no longer an impossibility, or even an imprudence, but offered the sympathy and solace which his life would now absolutely demand.

So for once the course of true love ran very smooth.

The day for the marriage was fixed—an early day after Lent—and Penborne was moved through its length and breadth. Somehow, it came to be considered that a demonstration of affection should be made to the bride's family. Who originated this idea nobody knew, or nobody but the originator.

At length the floating enthusiasm took the form of a suggestion that the tenantry of Pengeagle and friends in the neighbourhood should subscribe for a handsome testimonial of their regard. Not content with the prospect of making a simple gift, the promoters planned a grand presentation, and forthwith resolved themselves into a committee, with Mr. Tangert at the head of the finance, and Mr. Briggs at the head of the executive. Preparations for the marriage sunk into comparative insignificance. Even at the Gables, where they were supposed to know nothing of the matter, trousseau and wedding breakfast became subjects of secondary interest.

Mr. Fotheringay was to be had down for the day, and Pengeagle was to be the seat of the festivities. Mr. Pennant threw himself enthusiastically into the scheme, being always delighted to honour his wife's clever sisters. There was to be a procession to the house, meeting the Storcks at the principal gate, and then the presentation was to be made in the hall. Afterwards the whole company were to be the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Pennant at lunch. The subscribers received printed forms with the minutest details of the programme of proceedings. They were also favoured with white ties and rosettes, and the polite request 'to appear if possible in black clothes and tall hats'—Penborne full dress, in fact. The possibility of a funereal effect was counteracted by the order to the tenantry to appear mounted!

No pen could paint the state of things at Pengeagle on

the eventful day. It was Ricky-Racky in real life. The nurse began to help the cook, the cook began to hinder the housekeeper, the housekeeper began to scold the master, and so on. Mirry alone was perfectly serene in the midst of the confusion, reminding everyone of their imperative duties, and helping with her own swift hands in such preparations as had had to be left till the last morning.

The children were dressed in unusual splendour, and told to go away and keep themselves perfectly tidy. They went. . At last the lunch was set, the hall decorated, the carriage despatched to the Gables, the hostess arrayed in her silk attire, the servants expectant and impatient in the background, and the present placed in a convenient position by Mr. Briggs. The present was a silver épergne, accompanied by an illuminated address. Mr. Lamble, the largest tenant, had insisted on the biggest piece of plate that could be got for the money, and Mr. Briggs had acquiesced on the understanding that it should be something distinguée. these gentlemen had been opposed to the expenditure on the address; but Mr. Tangert, who had proposed it, had been backed up by a solid majority of the subscribers, and it had been Mr. Briggs who had soothed his following into passivity, and quietly made up the difference out of his own pocket.

A low rumbling and buzzing sound announced the approach of the procession long before it came in sight.

Even Mirry looked a little pale and excited as she stood in her crimson dress upon the steps waiting, with her husband on her right hand and Mr. Briggs on her left.

The carriage drew up first, and Mr. Pennant rushed with his hair (what Time and the children had left of it) and coattails flying to help Mrs. Storck into the house. Mrs. Storck (or so, at least, her younger daughters said) had Her Most Gracious Majesty in her mind, and she looked very majestic and most gracious in her black silk and bonnet with white plumes.

Mr. Briggs claimed Olivia, who was palpably on the verge of tears, and supported her as well as he could with his arm, which was trembling more than he cared to let her know.

Mr. Fotheringay with Bianca, bright as a bird of paradise in a shimmering dress of peacock blue, and Mr. Tangert with Tita, more demurely clad in a costume of the shade of gray-green known, I believe, as reseda, with the large puffed sleeves then coming into fashion with 'the few,' followed at a stately pace, though consumed with a desire to burst out laughing.

The rank and file, relieved of their 'mounts,' but still encumbered with their 'tall hats'—the which they would much sooner have parted with—streamed in indiscriminately.

The ladies, friends, and wives of the tenantry joined the Storcks, and were accommodated with chairs.

Mr. Briggs took his stand between them and the table on which stood the excuse for all this agitation and display. He drew a long breath, and paused to see that the general throng had pushed its way into the hall. Then he drew another long breath, pushed his hair unconsciously back from his forehead, and began unsteadily: 'I am sure we must all rejoice at this opportunity of testifying our regard, and I may say affection, for a lady whose ancestors have been associated with Penborne from time immemorial—I mean Mrs. Storck, whose gentleness and kindness have endeared her to all who have the happiness to know her. This sweetness she has transmitted to her beautiful and talented daughters.'

At this Olivia ceased to want to cry, and Bianca and Tita to want to laugh. It was sobering, for though well meant it was irony.

'We must all have felt,' continued Mr. Briggs, 'that, though proud of so much beauty and talent, we had no claim upon it. This is but a wild country district, and such

flowers are not destined to waste their sweetness on the desert air. We cannot but regret our loss, and yet we can give them our most heartfelt good wishes. I am convinced I express the will of the whole of the subscribers to this small token of our regard when I say that Miss Olivia Storck will take with her in leaving us our sincere hopes and prayers for her happiness. I could have wished that someone of more ability than myself had undertaken to make this presentation, but there are some things which words are powerless to express, and what we feel to-day is one of them.'

Mr. Briggs waved his hand gracefully in the direction of the table, where the present and address stood, and retired hastily into the background.

Olivia was quite unable to reply, and sat with her eyes downcast, ruffling the fur on her lovely cream-coloured dress.

'Tita, say something,' she implored under her breath.

Tita rose composedly, and resting her hands on the back of Olivia's chair, she said clearly, in her childish voice: 'My sister is so moved by the kind expression of your good wishes that she cannot even thank you, but you will understand that so much goodwill and kindness shown by her old friends just when she is going to leave them for a new life in a new world is more than she can bear with composure. But she will always remember this happy day, and whatever treasures she may accumulate, your handsome present, and the dear names of those who gave it, will always remind her of the true and loving hearts she has left behind her in old Penborne.'

Many of the company were rather scandalized that 'that little bit of a thing should get up and make a set speech, as cool as a cucumber;' but they all applauded vigorously, and added a sigh of relief that the business was well over; and greetings and general conversation ensued.

Olivia passed from group to group, thanking everyone personally for their kindness, and introducing her fiance to those of the neighbours who did not happen to know him.

'She does it very well,' sighed Mrs. Tangert, as the elegant figure swept out of earshot; 'and, after all, one's position nowadays is where one can get.'

There were tears mixed with Mrs. Lawrence's smiles, but they were wholly for her absent husband.

'The doctor can never get anywhere,' she lamented.
'Just as we were starting——'

And she launched out into a recital of the troubles of an overworked country practitioner.

'I wonder where the children are,' was an anxious comment which passed along the family.

They had been seen in the procession, rather draggled but hilarious, and no one knew what had become of them afterwards. Search brought to light five sorry spectacles. They had been fishing in the brook, having been told a thousand times that cold water doesn't hurt. Tottie was still passably tidy, and Jack with a shake and a brush would pass muster; but Tom was in rags, and Punch and Squire bespattered from head to foot. There was no help for it. Clean pinafores must make men and brothers of them. The lunch was ready—and the guests.

A promise to come in to dessert kept the young people within the trenches during the centuries which elapsed while the company was dismissing its chicken and veal. Nobody was inclined to hurry over lunch, for more speech-making remained to be done; but all things will end, and at last the five little messengers of doom were admitted.

Punch and Squire were placed one on each side of their father, while Jack proudly took his place in the general company, and Tottie and Tom seated themselves beside their mother.

It had been arranged that Mr. Lamble should propose

the health of the host and hostess, and he rose in some embarrassment to do so. His embarrassment was not entirely due to the fact that he was unused to making speeches, but was largely compounded of a fear that Bianca and Tita would come to be similarly provided for, to say nothing of the rapidly rising generation.

However, he alluded to this as a 'happy occasion when they were gathered around the Squire and Mrs. Pennant to rejoice in their rejoicing, as they, Mr. and Mrs. Pennant, had ever been ready to join in whatever had been for the advancement or pleasure of those around them.' He then eulogized Mr. Pennant as a most generous landlord, and Mrs. Pennant as a most charming and benevolent neighbour. He called attention to the pretty picture they made, surrounded by their promising family.

Mirry, lovely and radiant, did indeed make a pretty picture with the coquettish Tottie on one side, and Tom, his white pinafore acting like a mantle of charity, solid and complacent, on the other. But unfortunately, 'as cause of thoughts did ryse,' Mr. Lamble turned his eyes to the other end of the table, where Mr. Pennant was absorbed in contemplation of his beautiful wife. Left to their own devices, Punch and Squire were amusing themselves with some dried cherries. Punch's method was to begin with the stem, and gradually drawing up the globe of fruit to his lips, by raising his chin and making a sudden snap to get it into his mouth. This difficult process was beyond Squire, but he managed by holding on to the stem to swallow his cherry and bring it up again in a manner which was perfectly delightful. The effect of public notice bearing down upon him was that he let go and swallowed cherry, stem and all. He thought this would choke him, but he bore the tickling sensation like a Briton, and showed no other sign of embarrassment than becoming violently red in the face. Punch, on the other hand, missed his aim, and, bringing his chin down suddenly, found himself the centre of many amused glances.

Not such his father's, however. Hot and disconcerted, he bade the children behave themselves and pay attention.

Mr. Lamble resumed his speech, and bade everyone drink to the health of their hospitable host and hostess.

Punch and Squire paid strict attention, and this was the result:

- ''At man squeakth like a gooth,' said Punch.
- 'Man 'queakth 'ike a goo-ooth!' echoed Squire.

There was a merciful clatter at the lower end of the table. amidst which Mr. Pennant rose to respond for himself and his wife. He had a fine voice, and some ten years before had exercised his gifts of oratory to some effect at Conservative meetings. But his ambition to be a fine speaker was dead, and to-day the thoughts of his head went from him. He thanked those who had been the friends of his lonely boyhood for extending to his wife and children the good feeling they had always shown to himself, and gathering round them, as Mr. Lamble had expressed it, to rejoice in their rejoicing. The enthusiasm and generosity displayed on this occasion had been most gratifying, and the manner in which the day's programme had been carried out reflected the greatest credit on the committee, and he should ask them all to drink the health of these gentlemen, who with Mr. Briggs as energetic manager had fulfilled their labour of love so satisfactorily.

Great applause greeted this effort, not in itself a brilliant one, but rendered effective by the partiality of the hearers.

Mr. Randolph should have been present to have proposed the toast of the day, but a cold kept him at home, and the ever-useful Mr. Briggs took his place.

He rose slowly from his seat at Olivia's right hand, and began in a low voice, but without hesitation, to say that he felt himself unable to do justice to the theme on which he desired to express himself.

'I pointed just now,' he said, 'to the fact that Miss Storck in leaving us is but yielding herself to a decree of Fate. "She is not of us as I divine," and the world to which she belongs has come to claim its own. There cannot fail to be much of sadness in this thought, but we can console ourselves with the reflection that she is going to stand at the right hand of talent and success. Our clever friend, Mr. Fotheringay, is to be congratulated, not only on having won what we value so much, but on being able to offer a larger sphere of life and usefulness to energies and abilities which were chilled and cramped in our narrow and primitive society. He is, indeed, to be regarded as one of Fate's favourites, and not the least enviable characteristic of his good fortune is the fact that the lady of his choice recognised and appreciated his worth before the star of success rose on his career. It is with every confidence, therefore, that I give the toast, "Happiness and Prosperity to the Bride and Bridegroom elect."'

The health was drunk with enthusiasm, and Mr. Fotheringay rose with more emotion than he could have believed possible, to offer his thanks.

'Mr. Briggs,' he said, 'has paid an eloquent tribute to Miss Storck's worth, but in supposing that her sympathies have been chilled or curtailed by the simple and rustic surroundings of her home-life he has made, I think, a mistake. I come from that rough school which he calls the world, and it seems to me that the very simplicity and homeliness which he deprecates form the greatest charm of womanhood, and the best foundation for the happiness of home. Instead of priding myself that I can introduce my wife to a more eager life and a wider society than those to which she has been accustomed, I shall look back on the influences of her youth as having strengthened her mind by

keeping her free from many of the frivolities, the cares and pleasures of this world, and formed her taste by leaving her motions light and free in the midst of natural beauties and healthful pursuits, and most of all as having implanted in her mind an ideal of life at once true and sweet. world, I assure you, has no curriculum to be compared with this. My gratitude to those who have been associated with her youth must always be acute, and the feelings I have experienced to-day, in seeing how generously you give evidence to your goodwill, will only add to that gratitude. Miss Storck joins me in thanking you for all the good wishes and kind words which have been expressed to-day, and for the handsome present you have made her, which, with the flattering address, will be a lifelong remembrancer of your Cornish generosity and kindness. We thank you, "one and all," who have subscribed to this testimonial, and hope that Mr. Tangert will convey to any who may not have been able to attend to-day our sincere gratitude.'

The health of the subscribers was then drunk, which brought the toast-list proper to a close; but while Mr. Tangert was returning thanks in a short and gloomy speech, an indiscreet enthusiast, who was rather inclined not to go home till morning, proposed: 'The heir to this magnificent proputty.'

The health was drunk readily, and a still more indiscreet neighbour suggested: "Master Jack, make a speech."

Then it was a case of cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago blushed at the praise of their own loveliness. Not that there was any need to feel a sympathic heart-sinking, for Jack was the most self-possessed speaker. Mr. Lamble had been embarrassed by the prospect of a long train of similar demonstrations, Mr. Pennant by the general wearingness of things, Mr. Briggs by prepared-for emotion, Mr. Fotheringay by unprepared-for emotion, and Mr. Tangert

by a sense of having to appear thankful for putting out instead of taking in.

Jack had none of these embarrassments.

He got on his chair with alacrity, and said: 'Ladies and Gentlemen—I thank you for your kindness in drinking my health, when you had had quite enough of that kind of thing already; but as we have had plenty of talking to-day (hear, hear), I will not keep you to hear a speech. As all the fuss and good things are on account of Uncle Fred and Aunt Livvy going to get married, I will finish with them:

"We wish them joy, A girl and a boy!"

There was an awful pause, during which a whizzing sound like the course of a rocket was to be heard, and then the Squire exploded in a roar of laughter which shook the house. During the paralysis the boys vanished. There was no evidence of a preconcerted signal, but when everybody recovered from their stupor, there were four empty chairs standing in their places.

There was no more speech-making after that, and the general company soon departed.

When something like order was re-established, the elders of the family met in the drawing-room to discuss the events of the day.

Olivia was in a state of mind bordering on invalidism, and could only murmur that she felt that something in her life had been broken, and she should never feel the same again. Her natural comforter under the circumstances was so taken up with Mr. Briggs and his eloquence, that he left her to her mother's care, who assured her that she knew exactly how she felt.

Bianca and Tita were as loud as Mr. Fotheringay in Mr. Briggs' praise.

'There is something in that man,' said Bianca decisively.

- 'Everything he said was true except about our inheriting mother's sweetness. It was very kind of him to recognise the fact that we are cosmopolitan, and he expressed his ideas very nicely. There was a wonderful fitness in what he said, considering how few opportunities of improving his mind he has had. I should think there must be some native eloquence in him.'
- 'He looked like a good-natured lion as he pushed back his hair and began,' said Tita. 'I think the reason that what he said seemed better than the other speeches was that he was quite in earnest all through. Whatever there was that was ridiculous or commonplace in the proceedings it was not his part. When he called Fred the world come to claim its own (an impersonation you were rather eager to adopt, Fred), I thought I noticed a momentary spasm pass across his face as if he wanted to call him also the flesh and the devil, but instead he paid him a very high and sensible compliment. I think there is something very likeable about him.'
- 'Of course there is,' said Mr. Pennant. 'There is not a better-hearted fellow in the country, and a perfect gentleman, too, whatever you may think of his appearance.'
- 'For my part, I don't see anything amiss in his appearance,' interposed Mirry. 'If it is not in the latest fashion, you should remember, 'tis not the many coats that make the man, but the plain coat that is worn true. Anything more considerate than he has been through it all it would be impossible to imagine. And I am sure everything has been a perfect success.'
- 'Particularly the children's speeches,' suggested Mr. Fotheringay.
- 'Oh, those incorrigible children!' exclaimed their fond father. 'They will be the death of me some day;' and he went off into peals of laughter.
  - 'I hope nobody's feelings were hurt,' said Mirry with

sudden concern; 'but I thought Punch remarked that Mr. Lamble spoke like a goose, and I am sure what he said was most kind.'

'It was the way he speaks through his nose, poor fellow!' said Mr. Fotheringay; 'the boys couldn't help remarking it when they were told to pay attention. Squeaks like a goose was the exact truth. But if I had not known the children's engaging way of speaking, I should not have been able to make out what they said, and nobody above me could have heard distinctly, I am convinced, so you need not be alarmed.'

'Then don't you think it was a perfect success?' asked Mirry generally.

Bianca was the only one who responded, 'Yes!'

As Mr. Briggs and his friends went back to the town, much the same question was asked among them.

'Only one thing was wanting—that young fool Carlyon.'

# CHAPTER XIII.

'SAINT GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE!'

Hope is the dream of the man awake.'

Italian Proverb.

'ASPHODELS' made little progress at this period, though Olivia frequently entreated Tita to give up sewing and designing, and 'assume the black cap.' Tita explained that there was a time for all things, and now the spirit was not on her. It is strange that, though there must have been a break of months in the writing of the story, not the least internal evidence of it can be found. The only literary work which she kept up was her diary, the entries in which at this time are particularly hard to understand. While writing most kindly of Orlando, she never heard his name mentioned without annoyance, and scarcely deigned to look at the costly gift he sent to Olivia. More than that, when she herself received a tiny piece of delicate seaweed from Ostend, she burnt it remorselessly, and that though it was a rare specimen she wanted for her collection. She joined the others in making him a handsome wedding-present, but in her prayers he was no longer 'my poor Orlando,' as he had been-even at the worst-from her childhood, but only 'Orlando Carlyon.' She could not understand this mood herself, and many times asked herself the poet's question:

> 'Can calm despair and wild unrest Be tenants of a single breast?'

It seemed so. She could not tell where the calm ended and the unrest began, but the whole time she lived upon the rack.

It is related of a man broken on the wheel, that when his second shoulder was put out he burst out laughing, and when asked what made him laugh, he replied that he was amused to think what a fool he had been to suppose he could suffer anything after the shock to the system given by the first blow. With the sorrows of the heart it is far otherwise. Up to a certain point the sensibility increases.

It was probably rather to this gathering pain and unrest that Tita owed her inability to write than to the chance distraction of outward circumstances. In joining in the work and life around her she found her best relief. So it was fortunate that Olivia's marriage chanced just then.

It was decided that after the splendour of the presentation the wedding should be a quiet family affair. Accordingly, the bride went away from the church door, and the spectators went each to his or her own concerns.

The honeymoon was to be spent abroad, and Tita, to everyone's astonishment, volunteered to get the house in London ready for the return.

- 'But you cannot stay in a house alone with strange servants,' objected Olivia.
- 'Yes, I can. Why not? Bianca and I cannot both leave mother, and it is time we should assert our independence. How am I to stand up for woman's rights if I am afraid even to be in a house without all my friends about me?'
- 'You never do stand up for woman's rights, and you are not old enough by years to begin.'
- 'Well, how could I respect myself if I were such a coward as to give up my plans because I was afraid?'
- 'Then, take Ruth to help you with the boxes on the journey up, and to stay with you till you are used to the servants.'

'Ruth would only be something more to look after. I prefer to go alone.'

As usual, Tita carried her point, and that though she was really horribly nervous.

Orlando's old friends were not informed of the date of his wedding, but by a persistent search in the newspapers Tita had found out the day, and place, and hour. She could not have brought herself to confess that she was bent on seeing the last act in the drama, but her determination was unfaltering.

So it came to pass that she found herself installed late at night, alone, in an empty house in a quiet London square.

She had driven from the station to the agent's and obtained the key, and brought on her innumerable packing-cases.

She had candles and matches in her bag; there was nothing, in fact, that she had overlooked. She lit two candles, and placed them on a plaster bracket inside the door. The feeble light hardly penetrated to the corners of the small hall, and there was a chilliness in the air.

Tita's teeth chattered as she paid the cabman his charge. The man looked at her with a moment's curiosity, and then slammed the door and was gone.

Tita stood a minute with her hands clasped, and her eyes dilated, in the midst of the packages. Every sense was agonizingly alert.

What was she to do now she had brought herself into this situation? Should she sit down on one of the boxes and wait until daylight?

It was now about eleven, and she felt that before the morning she should have lost her reason. Her flesh was creeping already, and her heart beating by starts, though she told herself she had really nothing to fear.

Although she had never been ill, and never even ailing,

Tita was not strong, and her very fineness consisted largely in nervous sensitivity.

There can be no doubt that this temperament, scarcely healthy, belongs to the artist. It does not say much for human nature that the small and the frail, the deformed, and even the diseased, have generally won the bays. Surely power should show mightiest in the mightiest. But it is not so. The pride of life diverts the strongest intellects, and it is left to those who are not formed to shine in the physical struggle to listen to the music of the spheres. With women especially, the slight and the weak have been the great mind-workers. To go no further, Mrs. Browning and Charlotte Brontë are cases in proof.

To this class Tita belonged, though her constitution was perfectly sound. Sensitive to the slightest sound, the faintest movement of the air, she was susceptible to the sensation of horror in a peculiar degree. She had known all this when she decided to undertake the adventure. Her will enabled her to face the prospect, and her will enabled her to go through with it.

The smell of paint and varnish suggested the possibility of finding chips and shavings, and rendering the loneliness less intolerable with the companionship of a fire.

She lit another candle and crept softly through the house. All was orderly and clean, but she found some paper and ends of wood, and with the cover of one of the cases she managed to light a fire. There was no coal or fire-wood in the house, for by her own arrangement the servants were not to come in till the next afternoon. Beds and mattresses and some of the tables and chairs were already in their places, but most of the furniture was to be brought next day. Tita had bed-linen and blankets in plenty in her boxes, but she never thought of rest or sleep. To pass the night was her sole purpose.

The interest exerted in keeping the fire alight supported

her through her vigil, and the gray dawn found her weary, hungry, and sleepy, but none the worse for her night's suspense. She proceeded to open a hamper and get out some of the viands with which her mother had provided her.

Her hunger satisfied, she tried to open one of the larger packages, with the intention of getting out some blankets for her bed; but the cords cut her delicate fingers, and she gave up the attempt, flinging herself down on the mattress and making a pillow of her cloak, and falling asleep with the heavenly sunshine for a counterpane.

She slept soundly, but at last woke with a start. She had dreamt she was dead, and that they tolled the bell to tell the world; but it was only a neighbouring church-clock striking ten! She rose hastily, and flung herself on her knees at the side of the bed, as she would have done on her bare floor at home. But let us not ask what were her prayers that day. Enough to know that they made no mention of Orlando.

She ran downstairs and tried to unfasten the box which contained her wardrobe, but the knots were tighter than ever. However, she did not give up this time, though she scratched and bruised her hands in her nervous and ill-directed energy.

She took out a dress of brown silk—the prettiest costume she possessed—and a small bonnet. She arrayed herself in these, and added a black lace veil, which did not so much hide her face as render it perfectly unlike herself, she usually going unveiled. She surveyed herself in her hand-glass, and pronounced the effect satisfactory.

She then put the house-key in her pocket and went out.

It was a fine day, and a golden mist was rising through the trees in the square.

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on!" she repeated.

She walked as rapidly as her weariness and tensity would permit into the main road.

She stopped the first empty cab that came by, and got in, saying: 'Saint George's, Hanover Square!'

She reached the church in good time, and found a seat to serve her purpose in the north gallery. Here she could see everything without being conspicuous.

It seemed hours before any promise of a real ceremony appeared. She thought she had learnt the inscriptions on the tablets by heart, and the number of seats and windows, and the very expression of each flower, before the church began to fill. In reality only a few minutes passed.

A fat, well-dressed woman, with a drab, good-humoured face, came and sat beside her. After a few minutes she offered Tita her smelling-salts, remarking kindly enough: 'The weather is close for the time of the year. Don't you think so?'

- 'No,' said Tita; 'I think it is cold, and I never use salts, thank you.'
- 'Indeed,' said her neighbour, 'I should have thought you used them too much.'

Tita's face was always clear and colourless, but to-day it had a surface whiteness which was painfully remarkable, even through her veil. She began to wonder if she had done madly in coming to this scene of such tragic interest. She had heard of well-authenticated cases of people dying of fainting of the heart. Perhaps she might do so. Or suppose she should fall down in a swoon, or this woman next her should make some scene, or attract general notice in any way. Then she told herself she was doing no crime, and would stand by the result.

She was afraid to annoy her neighbour by too much coldness, so, though she had no wish to carry on an ordinary conversation in church, she turned and said stiffly: 'This place is admirably adapted for a pageant.'

'Yes, of course,' said the other; 'and this is a sensational wedding. I only know the bride and bridegroom by sight, but Miss Bullion's beauty and Mr. Carlyon's wealth—a million, they say, at least—have lent quite a romance to the affair.'

Tita shivered, and wondered who this strange woman could be, who came to a wedding when she knew neither the bride nor the bridegroom, and yet seemed so familiar with their names and attributes. She was really the gossiping correspondent of the *Atom Dance*, and as thirsty for 'copy' as a panther in the wilderness for blood. Tita would have trembled with something besides disgust if she had known these facts.

The entrance of the bridegroom's party caused a fortunate diversion.

Tita kept her eyes fixed on her lap for a second, but an irresistible impulse made her raise them. She felt a shock in doing so, which passed in the hundredth part of a second. Orlando was very little changed since they had parted, and that little change was less noticeable to-day than usual. Tita looked with eyes of earnest intuition, as if she would have read the inmost thoughts of his heart. But there was little in his face to help her. There was no nervousness, no exultation, nothing but deliberateness. His dream, if he had any, was the dream of the man awake.

As she watched him with a gaze like the eye of a photographic camera, he slightly drew up his neck and straightened his shoulders. The motion was characteristic, and the ghost of a smile passed across Tita's face.

'You know him, I dare say?' said her neighbour carelessly.

Tita had forgotten her existence.

- 'I knew him as a boy,' she said coldly.
- 'Not so very long ago, I should say,' remarked the other, by no means disconcerted. 'And yet he is the coolest-

looking bridegroom I ever saw, and my experience has not been limited. However, here come some more people, and there is Lady Vandemon looking as chic as ever.'

- 'Which is Lady Vandemon?' asked Tita with involuntary eagerness.
  - 'The one in steel gray.'
  - 'But she is ugly,' said Tita rashly.
- 'Oh no,' said the other. 'She is going off, of course, but still a handsome woman. Her features were never so correct as Miss Bullion's, but she was a good stayer, as the men say about the racehorses, which I doubt her niece's being.'
- 'Do the spectators join in the service?' asked Tita, with suggestion in her voice.
- 'Well, yes, of course, those who happen to know them; but with half the people of interest and fashion in London present it is impossible to pay much attention to the service.'

However, she took the hint, and was silent.

The turning of all heads announced the bride's arrival. As she moved up the nave Tita held her breath. Such perfect loveliness she had never seen. She was not too spell-bound, however, to carry her eyes to Orlando. He came forward with an air of satisfaction—that was the only word for it. You could see that his pulse was even, that there was no tumult in his blood, in this moment when heaven and earth smiled upon his passion. The bride looked very sweet and happy as she leaned on her father's arm, and you would little have guessed that over that perfect arrangement of Brussels lace and orange-blossoms tears of vexation had been shed, not by the bride, but by Madame Rigmarole and her myrmidons, who dreaded next to the Princess of Wales's orders those of Miss Gladys Bullion.

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'They are perfectly suited to one another,' reflected Tita to herself. 'From this hour the fever will leave me.'

She listened to the words of the service pronounced by Canon Cartwright and the vicar, as one in a trance, and she was quite unconscious that the lady beside her was taking copious notes, and stealing glances of wonderment between whiles at herself.

As soon as the bridal party had passed into the vestry she slipped quietly out, and made her way back to the empty house, to take up the burden of everyday life.

'Rest comes at length.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

## BALM OF GILBAD.

'This conception of fate is grand, is natural, and fully warranted to minds too lofty to be satisfied with the details of human life, but which have not risen to the far higher conception of a Providence to whom this unanimity and variety are but means to a higher end than they apparently involve. There is infinite blessing in having reached the nobler conception; the feeling of helplessness is relieved; the craving for sympathy from the ruling power is satisfied; there is a hold for veneration; there is room for hope; there is, above all, the stimulus and support of an end perceived or anticipated; a purpose which steeps in sanctity all human experience.'—MISS MARTINEAU.

TITA went through the task of setting Olivia's house in order mechanically. She saw to every detail conscientiously, but it was all with such chastened interest that she felt like one walking in a dream. She had gone through the crisis, and it had left her 'flaccid and drained.' The strange faces of the servants and workmen, and the new objects around her, stirred neither fear nor curiosity. Only when Olivia's arms were round her in a tight embrace, and Mr. Fotheringay held her hands, and both exclaimed, 'How pretty, how charming, I am sure you thought of that!' she realized that she had not thought for days.

With the return of her usual consciousness came a craving for 'silence and solitude to wrestle with her mighty grief.' She was not wanted here; perhaps, indeed, she was not wanted at home, but there she had her own pursuits

and hopes. So she soon made up her mind to be 'stepping westward,' in spite of Olivia's entreaties that she would just wait and see some of Mr. Fotheringay's charming artistic and literary acquaintances.

'What a confirmed old maid I must be!' thought Tita to herself, as she sank into her favourite chair beside the fireplace at home, and watched the flames curling round the block of applewood which had come from the tree overturned by last week's storm. Everything spoke of use and custom, and that gave her pleasure. She wondered if she had reached the point in her life when the past should seem her youth. 'To novelty, to acuteness of sensation, to hope, to ardour of pursuit, succeeds what is, in no inconsiderable degree, an equivalent for them all—" perception of ease." Herein is the exact difference between the young and the old.' Had age stolen upon her while her pulse was yet strong and her years few? Had she missed her movement in life's atom dance? Was she already out of the swimming? Rest seemed the highest good, and reflection the most positive form of work of which she was capable.

These were her first bitter-sweet thoughts as she surrendered herself to the influences of home. To them succeeded the passive calm which supports us through the awful moments when the heart asks of the soul, 'Why was I born?' Underneath all the tumultuating griefs and anxieties of our minds is the conviction that we are units in an immutable order. Whether we live, or only move, or, less still, only have our being, all things are ordered for us. Useless our struggles with Fate. We cannot call down a drop of rain from heaven, or cause to shine a gleam of lightning in the cloud, and the wills and the courses of the lives of those around us are no less forces of Nature, no less subject to an inexorable rule. Recognising the fact that our lives are a current, that our actions may have a con-

sistent aim, independent of the order of outward circumstances, is the secret of true happiness. Nothing else can satisfy the sinking and craving of our consciousness. It is the philosophy of the sage, the faith of the Christian. Without this recognition man may eat and drink, may dance and sing, may marry and give in marriage; but at the bottom of the hill stands Death, and if life has been but the full tide of these finite joys, what is it but tragedy at last? But if, on the other hand, grief vanquishes pride, and true love, though loved in vain, overcomes self-love, there is no tragedy. We must get something more out of affliction than peace. We must recognise its refining power, and cast our gold, our hearts' desires, in the fiery furnace with as little faltering as may be.

Tita's hand was 'firm and steady,' and if her spirits quailed, it was only in their inmost depths. Some shivers of terrible emotion shook her soul from time to time, but she could repress what she could not approve, and endure what she could not cure.

Olivia, in her first letter after Tita's return, wrote:

'It was a pity that you went away on Thursday, for in the afternoon Orlando brought his wife to call on me, and I am sure you would have liked to have seen her. I was on the point of writing that she was very pleasant, but that would not be strictly the truth, for the tone of her voice, the pose of her head, made it clear that she had been made to come. Her manner was certainly not patronizing, but she made my pretty room seem so small and bare, and all my artistic trifles paltry and worthless. I hope Orlando will not get tired of her elegant airs. I suppose we must return the call, but I feel convinced we shall see no more of them. Do not imagine from that that Orlando seemed disappointed in his visit. He was eagerly interested in everything, and when I showed them the épergne, he looked at it from every

point of view, and discovered such graces in it that he would have risen in Mr. Tangert's and Mr. Lamble's estimation. Even Mrs. Carlyon betrayed a languid curiosity about that. "From the tenants, I suppose?" she said. told them all about the procession and presentation. Orlando laughed, and said, "Why wasn't I there?" He asked scores of questions about you all, and I told him you had been with me here. He seemed for a moment surprised, not to say incredulous, and then asked when you left, and when I said, "Only to-day," he looked disconcerted. So, you see, it was a pity you went. Mrs. Carlyon was wishing to go, I know, long before she proposed to do so, and I cannot think why she waited so long, for if she had risen Orlando would have obeyed her will, for he is attention itself. It will be just as well that we should see no more of them, I suppose, as their ways cannot be our You will wonder why I feel so sure that our acquaintance is to go no further, but in London it is so easy to avoid meeting those you wish to drop, that there will be no difficulty on that score, and I feel sure that Mrs. Carlyon has the temperament to wear away a moorstone post, so it is no good for Orlando to oppose her will, even if he should wish to do so, which, of course, is very unlikely. I cannot describe how lovely she is, or how perfectly she was dressed. She knows how to compass the greatest amount of expense with the least amount of show, an art I never cultivated, and do not know how to appreciate.'

Orlando's name was no longer a prohibited word in the family, and Tita found it much easier, on the whole, to bear her thoughts of him when he was restored to a natural footing, than it had been when he was, as it were, excommunicated. But, with all her fortitude, she writhed under the unconscious suggestiveness of Olivia's letter. She thought first of Evangeline, and then with a flush of horror

she remembered herself, and was glad, and even ready to thank Providence, that she had followed her impulse to leave London. And then on the heels of this revulsion came the wonder if he, too, had felt something of the vague dejection at missing a chance encounter. But no, it was impossible! She was nothing to him, never had been. Yet why should he be surprised at so natural a thing as her having been with Olivia? why incredulous? And why was he disconcerted when he heard that she had left only that very day? Was she just a little more than nothing to him all the time? Was it nothing but a blind accident that——

But she would not think of it: that way madness lay.

When little more than a child Tita had heard an eloquent preacher say that there was not a man or woman in the world who had not been guilty of breaking all the Ten Commandments, and, young as she was, the saying had made a deep impression upon her: not because she conceived it possibly true, but because she felt that the speaker was sacrificing everything to making an effective period. The assertion came back to her after these years with a bitter significance. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. She would not trust her ideas to run loose in such debatable ground.

She once more turned her thoughts to her writing, and by a supreme effort of will concentrated her mind on the story which Olivia's marriage had interrupted.

It was with flutterings of infinite delight, even as she sat in her conviction of 'perpetual maidenhood,' that she found the old images rise up again at her bidding, and the spirit of the theme come once more upon her.

It has been mentioned that Tita was told by a clever cousin that unless she was a second Charlotte Brontë she could not expect to write successfully, situated as she was. The remark had aroused her resentment: not that she was

tired of that stock example of genius battening on obscurity, not that it was an imputation on her own ability, but it showed, she considered, a narrow conception of the 'strong divinity' which, working in the mind, makes the artist. Nature, she said, makes the poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician; 'the world' only teaches him to express himself. Given a nutshell, a Shakespeare will count himself a king of infinite space. He who has the infinite sky overhead, the infinite deep below, with all Nature for an open book, and the simple village experience for life's epitome, is as near wisdom as the sage who has ransacked the little store of earthly lore, or the traveller who has traversed half the globe, and never had time to make the acquaintance of himself.

'If someone would only tell me of a washerwoman with ten children who had arrived at fame by producing some intellectual treasure I should be convinced that genius does not what it must but what it will,' she said one day.

'My dear,' said her mother gravely, 'the poor washerwoman who has not time or opportunity to do anything grand, to write a clever book or paint a beautiful picture, need not be any the less refined, or even great, for that. If at the end of a life well spent she can look around her at her children grown up to be useful and honourable citizens, she will have the right to feel as wise as the king who has ruled his kingdom well, or the philosopher who has discovered and taught some great truth.'

This brought Tita back to her starting-point: what man is is of the first importance, what he does of the second.

This thought was the keynote of 'Asphodels.'

The story was an annal, neither 'short' nor 'simple,' of the rustic poor.

In thus setting her imagination to work on her homely surroundings, Tita Storck was a few years ahead of her time. Sensationalism was then fighting a winning battle against the subtler style which had drawn its interests from portrait-painting and analysis. But she had an excellent justification for her choice.

'For,' said she, 'I never knew anyone who was murdered, or violently robbed, or bitten by a mad dog; but I have known scores of people who have been reduced to poverty by their own thriftlessness or foolish trust in wild speculations, and a whole family so credulous that they killed their half-fattened pig and ate it because their local preacher predicted the end of the world for a certain date, and they said, What was the use of feeding the pig and salting the bacon if that was coming to pass? Once I thought I had lighted on an epic of Hades in the adventures of a maniac at large on Pengeagle Common, but it turned out to be a comedy of errors, founded on a stranger's jumping over a gate and scaring away a couple of weak-minded girls in hysterics.'

There was no lack of interest where the materials were wild enthusiasm and blind credulity, loyal reverence and sturdy independence. The critics found 'a dreamy Radicalism' in the book, and declared the writer wanted free education, the franchise, and community of goods for the lower classes. But Tita was guiltless of any such The only right she demanded for the poor was intentions. a common humanity. It may seem paradoxical, but while her vanity was gratified by the peasants touching their battered hats as she passed along the country lanes, she yet believed that social distinctions and class prejudices were a venomous poison, a force antagonistic alike to Christianity and our common humanity. Let a man possess what he can earn, and buy what he can afford, and still there is room for liberty, fraternity, and equality. This feeling-call it Radicalism if you like—would have saved Tita's head in a revolution, but would not have brought her a loaf of bread if she had been starving.

It was this recognition of the rights of the lowly-born

which made Tita give the curious name 'Asphodels' to her story. The meaning was rather hard to follow, but it was one of her peculiarities to be alive to distinctions which were barely perceptible to the 'general.' For example, she disliked Mary Queen of Scots far more than Cleopatra, and George IV. than Richard III., though to most of us there seems not a pin to choose between the whole of them. These prejudices were due—as far as they can be traced to a certain nicety of thought which was partly natural to Tita, and partly cultivated. Very frequently, when puzzled how to express her meaning, she would select a word as near to her purpose as she could think of, and look in the dictionary for a synonym which should bring her nearer her meaning, but we have her own word for it that never once did she thus get over her difficulty. The expressions in the dictionary invariably shaded off in opposite directions. Say she wanted a word to express capacity for action, less wide than 'power' and less positive than 'ability,' she would first look for 'ability,' which would be given as 'power, skill, capacity, qualification.' Then she would look for 'power,' which would be given as 'ability, strength, force, influence,' one word going off more and more narrow, and the other more and more wide. So she would have to choose between them, or search her brain for a substitute. Very often in the end the word would come spontaneously to her mind. There have been stylists whose writing has been such a perfect transcript of their ideas that they never required to score out one word and substitute another; but these have been prodigies, and no one need be ashamed of such a venial fault as Tita's when Wordsworth took a fortnight to find the right word for his sonnet! There was only one goddess who came into existence ready armed, and she sprang from the head of Jove.

It will be easily understood that anyone whose prejudices were so strong, and whose taste was so fastidious, often

found writing really hard work; and Tita had never the precocity of thought nor capacity for patient labour which sometimes goes with genius. There is no trace whatever that she could speak Greek as naturally as pigs squeak, or write Latin essays before she was trusted with a pockethandkerchief, or, indeed, had any phenomenal ability. Neither had she the perseverance which supported Sir Isaac Newton through his twice-wrought labours, nor the application which enabled Beckford to write 'Vathek' at a sitting of three days and two nights. She would sometimes sit for hours and produce but a few laborious lines, and again she would sit for hours and produce nothing. And never did her ideas flow directly through her pen, for the reason that her thoughts flew far faster than her hand could do, and she could neither check their flight to the pace of her pen, nor indulge in occasional breaks of consciousness to bring up her expression alongside her ideas. She often compared her mind to a shying horse—what it would not 'take' you could not make it-and when her mind would not dwell on certain subjects she could no more force it than she could mix oil and water. Her memory also was like Sancho Panza's, 'so special that, were it not that he was so unlucky as to forget all he had a mind to remember, there could not have been a better one in the whole island.'

With all these difficulties, the wonder will be that Tita could do good work at all. But she did, and felt a 'fierce and far delight' in doing it. She was no longer as chaff before the blast of fate, or a leaf upon the stream of life.

### CHAPTER XV.

#### WHAT WILL SHE DO WITH IT?

'It is good that we have sometimes troubles and crosses; for they often make a man enter into himself, and consider that he ought not to place his trust in any worldly thing.'—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

TITA made rapid progress with 'Asphodels,' and her thoughts were not distracted by news of Orlando. Olivia had prophesied, the acquaintance went no further than formal calls. Orlando and his wife kept in the stream of fashion, while Mr. Fotheringay's friends were authors and artists, or hard-headed barristers, who looked with contempt on the blue-winged sipping butterflies of society. In this feeling of contempt Olivia certainly did not join, but she recognised the fact that her husband's present income did not admit of any ambitious style of living, and she contented herself with the clever acquaintances he had made before his marriage, trusting to her own sharpness and 'Fred's connections' to open the doors of a more fashionable set, when they should be in a position to entertain them. The small house in the quiet square was always open to the witty and the wise, who were none the less welcome that Olivia was always hoping to turn them to account in connection with Tita's writing.

Among such friends as these it was not to be expected that Mrs. Carlyon should shed her beams. Under Lady Vandemon's care she was launched into a very different circle, and plunged into the gaieties of society with a devotion surpassing even that of her worldly-minded aunt, for the latter was occasionally visited by a passionate impulse to live some other life than that of the world. the Cartwrights Olivia heard now and then of the Carlyons' proceedings; but there was not much to learn. Janet sometimes darkly hinted that unless Cornish mines were indeed inexhaustible her friends must be making a ruinous inroad into their means; but, then, Janet was prejudiced, and a young woman who would say that another had wished to be married on Shrove Tuesday that she might get the honeymoon over during Lent was not in Olivia's opinion to be implicitly trusted. It was Olivia's conviction that Janet, notwithstanding her vows to good works, had had a decided weakness for Orlando herself, and so she received with caution comments on the state of affairs in Grosvenor Gardens, and took care that such gossip should not disturb the serenity of Penborne.

Under these circumstances Tita's story advanced to a close, and she had completed her revision by the time Olivia and Mr. Fotheringay came to the Gables for a flying summer holiday.

Olivia read the corrected manuscript with delight, and begged to be allowed to show it to some friends with influence in literary circles. But once more Tita declined what she called patronage. Olivia remonstrated, entreated, but all to no purpose. Tita was inexorable, and Olivia had to return without the desired permission.

Now came the question, what was she to do for herself? It was true she might go on like the nightingale, singing to the night, but then what should she be doing for the world's regeneration? There were rustic poets, who, having discovered that 'love' and 'dove,' and 'dear 'and 'cheer,' make a happy jingle, had their works printed at Bodmin by subscription, and there were tellers of good stories who had

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'Poison!' thought Tita anxiously, as she laid him exhausted on his little bed. Henbane, and hemlock, and aconite, and a hundred other hurtful and malignant plants, grew on and about the moor. The whole family might easily perish, running freely amongst such deadly dangers every day. The only wonder was that they had all survived so long.

As soon as Tom's poor little eyelids closed over his eyes, she sped away in search of the rest of her charges. Why had she left them out of her sight one instant?

Five minutes' running, after her instinct, brought her suddenly on a very pretty picture, namely, the nursemaid sitting under a laburnum reading a novel, while the 'second best baby'—a card of the same suit as Jack and Tottie—played at making rain, shaking white sand through an old gravy-strainer. The only gratification which Tita got out of the spectacle was the reflection that one of the pack was safe and well.

'Where are the others?' she demanded hurriedly.

But all she could discover was that they were 'somewhere round.'

Leaving Lauretta Alma with strict injunctions to see that Miss Buttercup did not choke herself with sand, or cut her head open with the gravy-strainer, or fall a prey to some other such imminent risk, Tita ran on down the hill, and soon caught the sound of a voice singing some sort of a song, with a chorus, given double fortissimo:

> 'Wrap the greens round the bacon, Tol-de-rol-ol-la!'

Proceeding in the direction of the sound, she perceived on a bank by the brook the missing party. Tottie was reading a book of fairy-tales purloined during her mother's absence from the holiday shelf. Beside her lay Jack, occasionally bursting into song, and occasionally projecting puffs of fragrant tobacco-smoke. Herein, she thought with amusement, lay the whole mystery of Tom's ailment. She laughed to think that she could ever have feared that anything seriously wrong could happen to Mirry's children.

However, she remarked Punch and Squire a little apart, rubbing up dried dock leaves, with which they were filling extemporary pipes. Punch's pipe was formed of a walnutshell with a goosequill inserted, while Squire had made no bad substitute with a small potato scooped out, and a stout straw.

Tita was doubtful how well-dried dock leaves might agree with even *their* constitutions, so she came forward to catechise Jack.

The children feigned an indifference to her approach, having learnt by sad experience that playing with their aunts was always a hindering and often a thankless pastime.

Jack continued smoking his cigarette, formed of white paper wrapped tightly round genuine tobacco.

- 'Jack,' said Tita cautiously, 'doesn't smoking make you children ill?'
- 'Only Tom,' replied Jack graciously. 'Punch and Squire can smoke anything almost—dock leaves, brown paper, ash leaves, black cotton, burnt rags, just anything.'
- 'But who taught you to smoke, and make pipes and cigars?'
- 'A man that sells tops and liquorice taught me to make pipes, but I like cigars much better now, and Uncle Fred taught me to make them when he was down. He used to sit and smoke and smoke, and put his arm round Aunt

Livvy's waist to keep himself steady, for it does make a body's head go round sometimes, and I want Tottie to let me hold on to her; but she is not so good-tempered as Aunt Livvy, and so she won't, and all she'll do is bone the matches.'

- 'And where did Uncle Fred smoke and smoke, with his arm round Aunt Livvy's waist?' asked Tita curiously, suspecting that Jack was drawing from his imagination.
- 'Why, in the study at granny's, to be sure! and Aunt Livvy read an awful great long copy.'

Tita had seated herself on the grass, and was looking intently at Jack's diminishing cigarette.

- 'There isn't much left of that cigar you're smoking, Jack,' she said. 'Have you any more that Uncle Fred showed you how to make?'
  - 'Girls don't smoke,' said Jack discouragingly.
- 'I only want to see,' said Tita nervously, eyeing the rim of white paper, which was now close to Jack's lips. It seemed to her that there were two or three words written on it in her own writing.

Tita looked so beseeching that Jack could not help drawing from his pocket his one remaining treasure.

'There, auntie,' he said with a grand air, 'it is the only one I have left.'

Tita took it with a trembling hand. It was indeed her writing. She could make out a few disconnected words which fitted all too well into a pattern in her memory. It was part of her missing 'Asphodels'!

- 'Where did you get this paper?' she asked huskily.
- 'I don't know,' said Jack, bewildered at her earnestness.
- 'But you must try to remember,' said Tita with unusual severity.
- 'Uncle Fred showed me how to make some cigars like his, and then I found some of his tobacco and I made some for myself. I picked up the paper anywhere.'

'Have you any left?'

'No, auntie. I smoked a considerable deal myself, and I gave some to the boys, and that one I lent you is the last. You can keep it, if you think so much of it. I dare say I shall find some more tobacco soon.'

It was useless debating the point. No doubt the boys had smoked and destroyed her manuscript, or the greater part of it, and all her year's labour was irretrievably lost. Yet Tita did not blame the children. It was certainly their elders' fault. She resolved to say no word on the subject of her loss, but to endure it with silent patience. It was a bitter disappointment, and the tears rose to her eyes as she sat regarding the fragmentary evidence of her misfortune.

The children gathered round, knowing well that her heart was sore.

Tottie flung her arms around her neck, and tried to comfort her with kisses and tears. Punch and Squire threw away their pipes, and joined the dismal chorus, while Jack, with a sense of being somehow the chief culprit, choked down his rising sobs with agonizing difficulty.

'If you'll not cry, auntie, I'll ask Mr. Briggs to marry you, and I'm sure he will, for when anything vexed Aunt Livvy I always asked him, and he said he would but she'd rather have someone else; and last week when Aunt Annie'—that was Bianca—'had such a bad headache, I asked him if he would marry her instead, and he went red in the face like Squire goes when he swallows anything too big for his throat; but he said, "Perhaps so," and as Aunt Annie is all right again I'm sure he'd have you.'

This crowning comfort did not arrest Tita's tears, and as they had never seen her cry before, the children knew her woe must be great.

The only tribute they could bring to her easement was to

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make the oft-reiterated promise to be good children, and with this assurance she stole away to ruminate over the calamity, which solved the difficulty: 'what was she to do with it?'

Thus ended her dream of fame, like many another, in a puff of smoke!

### CHAPTER XVI.

### RECKONING WITHOUT YOUR HOST.

- 'Sir Toby Belch: Thy exquisite reason, dear knight?
- 'Sir Andrew Aguecheek: I have no exquisite reason for't, but I have reason good enough.'

Twelfth Night.

OLIVIA had returned to town without the desired permission, but not without the manuscript.

Despairing of moving Tita's resolution, and knowing what her literary intentions generally ended in, she took the bold measure of carrying off the prize surreptitiously. So while Tita was resigning herself to her sad misfortune, Olivia was trembling lest her proceeding should be discovered and her plans upset. As she heard nothing of the loss of the manuscript from the Gables, she concluded that Tita must have forgotten her idea of seeing what she could do for herself, or had undertaken some new performance, which for the time had crowded out the thought of 'Asphodels.'

The friend on whose advice and assistance she counted was a Mr. Sabota, the correspondent of a very well-known weekly paper, and the author of one successful drama and more than one successful novel.

On her return home she sent him a note, requesting his presence, and explaining fully for what purpose she wanted his help.

He responded at once to her summons, though he was by no means sanguine as to the probability of helping unknown genius into the daylight. Miss Martineau has left it on record that never in her experience was she able to help forward obscure talent, though, remembering her own struggles, she carried the most benevolent intention towards the beginner. Genius is an aqua-fortis which must eat its own way.

With this unpleasant conviction in his mind, Mr. Sabota appeared in Beaumont Square. He had often heard o Tita's talents, but he knew he must put down much of Olivia's enthusiasm to partiality. He came to the council quite prepared to give in his verdict 'Found wanting.'

Olivia was in a fever of excitement, but assumed as nonchalant an air as possible, and received her guest with no more than ordinary cordiality.

- 'I hope you will allow me to read you the opening chapter of "Asphodels," she said; 'and if you think well of it, I shall be glad if you will take the manuscript away with you, and go through it as quickly as you can, for I must confess I am acting in direct opposition to my sister's wishes in showing it to you. In fact, I carried off the book without her knowledge, and live every day in fear of detection, and a peremptory order to restore the stolen property.'
- 'Then, your sister is not bent on getting out her book by fair means or foul?'
- 'No, indeed. She might probably have been a pretty well-known writer by this time if she would have condescended to accept such means of publication as most people are only too glad to take. But her one idea is that a novel should be accepted by a publisher entirely for its intrinsic merit, and she thinks what she calls patronage a degradation to art.'

Mr. Sabota passed his hand across his uneven forehead. He was a very ugly man, with small, bead-like eyes and shaggy hair and eyebrows; but his whole expression was shrewdness and honesty, and he had none of that painful diffidence which is more of a drawback to many plain people than their faulty features and sallow skin. His clever smile was never long absent from his face, and illumined it with a brightness which more than made up for its want of regularity. To most of us, after all, light and heat are more grateful than mere form and colour.

- 'Why does your sister write?' he asked after a moment's reflection.
- 'She always says because she has something to say, and an impulse to express herself.'
- 'The former is impossible. Nobody but the Americans have anything to say nowadays.'
- 'Don't generalize with me. I think you would find if someone would write a really thrilling and concentrated story, without the limbs and flourishes, and subtle analysis, on which we are being surfeited, it would take immensely.'
- 'You may be right there; but in a year or two it would fall like Lucifer, never to rise again.'
- 'Having written a successful story would be an "open sesame," though, I suppose, and that is what I want for Tita.'
- 'But can she write a story of concentrated interest, such as I am willing to admit there may be an unusually good opening for at the present time?'
- 'You shall judge for yourself. Even Fred, who is not enthusiastic about anything, sat up two nights to go through "Asphodels." If you do not find your attention riveted by the beginning of the story, you may leave it here, and I will return it by to-morrow's post.'

She produced the manuscript and read the opening scene in her sweet, fresh Cornish voice.

- 'What do you think of it?' she asked with simulated composure.
  - 'It is marvellously well written for a prentice hand.'
- 'Whatever Tita is, she is not a prentice hand. She has been writing diligently for the last fourteen or sixteen years.'
- 'And has tried to get what she has written published, and not been able to do so?' demanded Mr. Sabota in surprise.
- 'I don't know that she ever sent a complete novel to any publisher. She wrote one the winter before last, but I believe some scruple made her hesitate to offer it. But short stories and essays she has sent to the magazines in any number. They generally came back unread. I think myself that until lately there has been a crudity in her writing. Her thoughts seem too big for her head, a good failing in a schoolgirl, but a bad one in a novelist. However, I think she is getting over that, or learning, like the wise ones of the earth, to veil her ignorance. But what I particularly want to know is, are you interested? That will be the test for the novel in a little time, not whether you are edified, or enlightened, or even amused.'
- 'I am interested, most certainly, but yet I cannot think why!'

He surveyed the woman beside him with close scrutiny, as if he suspected her of hypnotizing him—or mesmerizing, as it used to be called, when the subject was lulled off to incapacity by sundry mysterious passes.

- 'You are a good-looking woman, with a well-shaped head and beautiful hair,' he went on argumentatively; 'and if you have not a voice of gold, at least it's of frosted silver! You have not bewitched me, have you?'
- 'Hippopotamus!' was the word which rose to Olivia's lips; but she said, oh so sweetly! shaking her head: 'Useless to try. The very point of Tita is that she absorbs you, and yet you cannot tell why. I think it is because she

combines two good qualities. She tells a strong story in a literary style. Will you take the manuscript, or shall I put it away again?'

- 'I will take it.'
- 'Let me beg you to form your opinion as quickly as you can, for I know not what a day may bring forth.'
- 'If nothing unforeseen occurs, I will get through it by the end of the week, always providing I find the rest equal to the first chapter, and then you shall have my plain, unvarnished opinion.'

At the end of the week Mr. Sabota returned, looking unusually grave.

'You are disappointed?' surmised Olivia, with a sinking heart.

'On the contrary, I have formed such a favourable opinion of the book that I am almost afraid to express myself. It is a good story, well told. But that is not the extraordinary part of it. It is the new and enchanting way in which everything is looked at which captivates one. I believe the book will make a mark, and I should like you to let me show it to Mr. Whitston's reader, who is a friend of mine, that I may get his opinion. I have been a critic, and I have been a novel-writer, but I dare not trust my own judgment about this. It seems too incredible that an inexperienced girl should charm us with the wisdom of Socrates, lighted up by the right Promethean fire. I know I have fallen in love with the book, and love is blind, the proverb says, and I would willingly believe it.' (He pointed this remark with a glance at his reflection in the mirror.) 'So I say let us get another opinion. I can warrant Beveridge not to err on the side of leniency. He has the fear of Mr. Mudie ever before his eyes, and Whitston's people put out less mediocre literature than any other firm in the kingdom. If Beveridge says the book has merit, you and I shall not have been mistaken.'

- 'Do you think a publisher's "reader" is likely to be a fair judge of such a style of writing as Tita's?'
- 'Probably not. The mind which could perfectly appreciate the poetic humanity, the aphoristic wisdom, the quaint tolerance of "Asphodels," would sicken over the task of "tasting" the common run of books; but the reader has an instinct like the scent of the foxhound, which tells him what book will run, and it is wise and convenient to believe in his infallibility. You cannot conceive what accuracy of judgment comes with professional experience.'
- 'Well, I seem to fear your infallible Mr. Beveridge more than all the troop of critics, who, for that matter, are delightfully human people, as far as my experience goes. But if the ordeal has to be gone through, let it be done at once.'
- 'Very well. I will leave the manuscript at Whitston's to-morrow morning, and press for an early opinion. But I really think you need not be very anxious; I feel convinced the book will satisfy all the stern requirements of the reader. I read a chapter or two to some friends—Bohemian ragamuffins most of them—last night, and they were much stirred. In fact, to have heard them talk, one would have thought that dignified simplicity had never been portrayed in the "Vicar of Wakefield," nor rustic helplessness sympathized with in Gray's "Elegy." The style is what the Americans call "infinitely fetching," and if that is not its chief merit, it is one which is not to be despised, for it puts the general body of readers at once into sympathy with the writer.'
- 'Do you think Tita's characters well drawn? I have feared sometimes that her range is limited. She will give you pages of the cleverest analysis of their thoughts and feelings, absorb you in the dramatic purpose of their impulses and wishes, and yet give you less impression of their individuality than you would get in ten words from Dickens.'

'I will tell you why that is. It is because your sister looks out for the traits which are natural and common to men and women rather than for those which are true and peculiar to individuals. It is the story of a human soul, of twenty human souls, she is telling. But I do not think on occasion she fails to carry force in her character-drawing. The Bryanite preacher in "Asphodels" is as real as Mrs. Gamp or Silas Wegg. I should say Miss Storck's chief failing is in her dialogue. It is not natural. You and I may converse in far-fetched language, because, when I am off the rack, that is, the printing-press, I must have the right word, at any cost to liquidity, and though I go to Jericho for it.'

'You go further than that sometimes,' said Olivia, smiling.

Mr. Sabota enjoyed her sarcasm.

- 'Yes,' he replied good-humouredly, 'and generally you are willing enough to take a seat on the footboard of my chariot; but I imagine Cornish miners and fishermen do not go so deep for their ideas, and consequently do not require such elaborate language to express them. Now, the conversations in "Asphodels" are impossibly quaint and wise. You do not notice the fault so much while you are reading the book, but it strikes you afterwards that Dissenting ministers and farm-labourers do not talk like sages and philosophers.'
- 'I believe you would find that really their ideas are just as quaint and wise as yours and mine, and their talk just as edifying. I think it is very possible that the Cornish working classes are more intelligent than the rural population in other counties. I cannot tell why it should be so, and, of course, I know that in times past we have not enjoyed a high reputation for spirituality—if you must have the fine, right word—when smuggling and wrecking made us a by-word; but strangers often remark on the quick-witted-

ness of the natives, and find the labourers' and fishermen's comments very suggestive. But the reason that Tita's conversation is so—must I say "hairy" as opposed to "bald," or "thick" as opposed to "thin"? I fear I am slipping off the footboard,' said Olivia, laughing.

- 'I know what you mean,' said Mr. Sabota hastily; 'but it is not in my power to fetch home language for other people. So tell me without further delay what makes Miss Storck give us such high dialogue?'
- 'I have heard Tita say that she does not see the use of reproducing colloquy. As long as the world lasts you will always be able to get that by going into the street and hailing your nearest neighbour, and if you get no further than the weather it will be better than commonplace out of a book, for the head-shaking and hand-waving and scattered "ahems!" will vitalize it.'
- 'If you can remember your sister's casual sayings like that, what a storehouse your memory must be!'
- 'I could write volumes of her comments on men and things. For years her encouragement and development were the chief, almost the only, aim of my life. To most people she seemed a rather quiet, reserved, strong-willed girl; but to me she was a mine of interest and entertainment. I know she sometimes regarded me with the same uneasy distrust that Dr. Johnson must have felt for Boswell, but when she was warmed up beyond a certain point, put on her mettle as it were, she seemed to think and speak by inspiration. I don't mean, of course, that all she said was wise or worth repeating, but when you had stirred up her artistic instincts, her ideas came to her like sparks from heaven. I have heard her say that at such times she felt unusually nervous, and I never see the expression "nervous style" without thinking of Tita's half-painful exaltation. I remember one spring morning walking along the commons with her and playing upon her literary instincts. I

knew she resented being regarded in what she called "a bony light," but I could not help drawing her out. was as quick as mercury to catch the tendency of your remarks, and the simplest question would put her, as I said, on her mettle. One question I asked her was what the thatch of an old cottage roof we passed looked like. She answered instantly, "The fur on a rabbit's back." I can give you no idea of the appositeness of the comparison. Further on we came in sight of a sweep of the Cornish hills, blue in the distance, flecked with masses of yet unmelted snow. I asked her what that was like, and she said, "A billow of the sea." I dare say she would have gone on for hours giving me "jewels five words long," but I knew I was keeping her mind at a painful tension, and I tried to fix my own on some more common interest. I have heard old people say that a sigh draws a drop of blood from the heart, and I always felt that every time Tita's mind was overstrained, something was being taken out of her animal life. You will not wonder, when I tell you all this, that I feel a tragic interest in the fate of her book. I feel that success would stimulate the mental circulation. And I am sure there is that in her which will enable her to live up to success. I am no artist, but I know what art-life is: I have not stood at its portals, sat on its footboard, for nothing. I lived for little else but to feed and strengthen Tita's mind for years, until, in fact, Fred appeared upon the scene, and said, "To-morrow to fresh woods." And I don't know that I should have deserted my post then, but I felt her bias was taken, and that I could help her more here than at home. However, this is rank treason, and there is Fred's knock at the door. "Break we our watch up."

Mr. Beveridge was no critic, but he had no hesitation in pronouncing 'Asphodels' a good book, and recommending its immediate publication.

This verdict was no sooner known than a considerable

circle awaited with impatience the début of Tita Storck. Nobody knows how such rumours get about, but literary and artistic gossip flies around with the same speed as scandal, and before Mr. Sabota came to Beaumont Square to report that their highest estimate seemed justified, a score of critics and correspondents were buzzing it around that there was a sensation in store for the literary world.

- 'The only question now is, On what terms shall Whitston put the book out?' said Mr. Sabota.
- 'There is just one other question,' said Olivia, 'and that is, What will Tita say to all this?'
  - Surely there can be no objection to what we have done.'
  - 'I wish I felt so sure of it.'
- 'You had better write to her at once, and say that Mr. Whitston, the publisher, having come across her manuscript, considers it a work of merit, and would be willing to issue it on favourable terms.'

Olivia accordingly wrote in hot haste to acquaint Tita with the state of affairs.

## 'DARLING TITA' (she began),

'If the end ever justifies the means, I am sure you will not blame me for what I did when at home. You know how enchanted I was with your new story, and how anxious that you should let me lay it before some publisher, feeling quite sure that its merits would ensure its immediate acceptance. Well, as you refused, I took the strong measure of kidnapping the manuscript, and have ever since been dreading that you might discover your loss and pour the vials of your wrath on my devoted head. But I knew there was a great chance that some new project would enter your mind, and you would forget all about "Asphodels," and it seems in that conjecture I was right. From your silence I judge that you have laid aside your plans. That is best. Do you write, and leave the drudgery to me. Perhaps I

ought not to call it drudgery when everything promises to run smoothly. Mr. Whitston, the great publisher, would be willing to issue your story, and I think you might make very favourable terms with him. If you like to enter into correspondence with him on the subject, I will tell you all that has passed, or if, better still, you would prefer to get some professional man to see to the technicalities for you, I know a Mr. Sabota, the author of "Crooked Answers," who would, I dare say, be very willing to help you. Let me have your answer at once.'

Tita was infinitely relieved to find that her manuscript was safe, but could not refrain from the bitter thought that by her patient forbearance she had called forth something very like a sneer from Olivia. She was willing to forgive the sin, but her heart was hardened by the trick which had been played upon her. She knew perfectly well what had happened, in outline; how Olivia had carried off her book to show to her friend, Mr. Sabota, and how Mr. Sabota had passed it on, with a strong recommendation to mercy, to his friend, and his friend to the publisher. It was just the very process she had always revolted from. She sat down to answer in the heat of her displeasure, and certainly expressed herself 'from the liver out.'

# 'DEAREST OLIVIA' (she wrote),

'The first thing you will care to hear from me, of course, is that I freely forgive you for carrying off my sole copy of "Asphodels." But I must tell you, though I wish I could refrain from doing so, that I did discover its loss, and that at once on your leaving, as I intended to have availed myself of the simple conveyance of the letter-post to lay the manuscript before one of the best publishers, "feeling sure that its merits," etc. Not being as methodical as could be wished, I thought at first that perhaps I had mis-

placed the papers myself, and before I had given up that hope I discovered Jack smoking the manuscript of the last chapter as a cigar! I was able to say, Sic transit gloria mundi, but it was a bitter disappointment, and I am thankful to find that the boys had only helped themselves to the contents of the waste-paper basket. But as things are, I shall not enter into correspondence with Mr. Whitston, as the book has been submitted to him with a strong recommendation, I know. If you like to tell me all that has passed you can do so, but I think it is immaterial, as I can guess perfectly well for myself. You do not mention that Mr. Sabota has as yet had anything to do with the affair, but I feel sure I may venture to send my thanks to him for his good offices, as well as his kind intentions. Between you, you have shot your arrow o'er the house and hurt your sister. I can neither accept your proposals nor follow my own plan, but at some future date, under another name, perhaps, I may see my way to attempting the publication. So please return the manuscript at once, and consider the matter at an end.'

It is impossible to judge Tita's motives. They were a mixture of impractical vanity and consistent high-mindedness. Her principle was right enough, but it was adapted to a world ruled by a totally different order from that which governs ours at present. That a work of art should stand or fall on its own merits is an incontrovertible tenet, and if hanging committees and publishers' readers were supplied direct from Parnassus, with integrity on the same scale as their ability, it would be well to constitute them the sole priests of fame. Of course, the walls of the Academy should be hung with the best productions of the times, and none that are poor or false; and the publishers should issue the cleverest writing of the day, and none that is mediocre or ignoble; but we are mortal all, and the vestibules to the

Temple of Fame are crowded with a motley horde of traders. Thoughts are bought and sold, and place and precedence are not always to the worthiest. But there is a wise judge who presides over all things, whose name is Time. It is he who crowns Turner and Keats, and he looks at ends, not means.

Tita was deaf to these suggestions of reason and commonsense, and her answer to Olivia was a sort of declaration of faith that artists never, never should be slaves.

Olivia protested, entreated, and pointed out that the book would have to stand before the critics entirely on its own merits. Tita replied that no work of hers should come out under the wing of some already successful writer, and that she would meet the critics in some new guise.

Olivia was plunged in despair, but she dared not trifle with Tita further.

So it soon came to be known that the promised work by Miss Storck was withdrawn.

### CHAPTER XVII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

'Some said, John, print it. . . .

Now was I in a straight, and did not see

Which was the best thing to be done by me.'

Bunyan.

TITA felt bound in honour to make some effort towards doing for herself what Olivia would so gladly have done for her. It seemed to her that this last unlucky proceeding had shut the door on her scheme of sending 'Asphodels' round to the publishers in turn, till one should accept it. For very likely some rumour might have reached them through Mr. Sabota, or some other of Olivia's literary friends, and she should never be able to feel sure that personal influence was not at work.

What was she to do? She had neither experience nor capital enough to set up, like Mr. Ruskin, publisher on her own account, and she knew that instead of reforming the world by refusing to bow down to the golden image, Whatever-is-is-best, she was paining her friends, and, further, giving occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Would not everyone who knew of her conduct call her Quixotic?—and at that time Don Quixote was not regarded as a magnificent reformer and martyr, but a crazy humbug. And was it not really straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel? Would it not be better to take the good the gods

various response to each varying blast,' and the chances are provide? What aim was she furthering by her obstinate resistance? Would there be one less chapter of rubbish published because she let her works moulder on the shelf? What could she, helpless and unknown, do towards rooting up the million-rooted abuse? Then, was there any such great abuse, after all? The novelist brought his wares to the market, as the farmer might bring his sheep or oxen, and took his price for them. Stay, though; he did not take his price for them. Many a good work never saw the day, and many a poor, worthless paper was paid for. For the best books there was sure to be a certain demand, but neither the demand nor the pay was in proportion to the merit.

What a blessing if there could be some tribunal which should help those whose talents were distinctly literary to turn their ideas into the most congenial channels, and, having done so, should put them in the right direction to dispose of their productions, and, better still, should say to those who are doomed to learn the same sad truth from bitter experience, 'Sir, you have no talent for writing; you had better learn some other trade.' They manage these things better in France.

As if in answer to Tita's dream, there was started about this time in London an association called the Metropolitan Amateur Literary Society. The avowed object of the society, put coarsely, was to bring buyer and seller together—in fact, to give the needed help to inexperienced authors. There was a long list of patrons and patronesses, lords and ladies, and amateur authors. The benefit of membership was to be enjoyed for the sum of £3 down, and an annual subscription of £1. Members were entitled to forward their works to the secretary for insertion in a monthly list, which was sent to each of the publishers. In addition to this, they were advised in what channels to dispose of their wares,

and brought into communication with editors and publishers. To crown all things, they were entitled to affix the letters M.M.A.L.S. to their names.

Tita had not yet forgotten her experience with the Up and Doing Publishing Company—in fact, the memory of it yet was green. But the society was founded on the most sensible principle, and seemed to be countenanced by a numerous and respectable company. The idea of systematic assistance for the amateur took Tita's fancy. It seemed to supply a need, and everything was to be done in such a business-like way that there could be no feeling of obligation.

She remembered the story of the writer who sent two papers to the magazines, and had them both returned, and, nothing daunted, changed them over, and sent them off again to the same quarters, this time to be both accepted!

If an experienced middleman could be found to suggest probable markets for amateur work, a great deal of trouble and annoyance would be saved. This was exactly the practical office which this association of amateurs proposed to exercise for one another.

In addition to the more practical assistance to be afforded to literary aspirants, the society proposed to hold soirées, concerts, lectures, and conversaziones for the benefit of members and their friends—in short, it was a scheme more like the ideal projects of Sir Walter Besant than an enterprise of this sordid, everyday world. And yet it was real!

The undertaking was floated, lords and ladies had patronized, entertainments were organized, members had joined, and the secretary, Mr. Ulysses Grayling, presided over an office, and presumably an efficient staff, in one of the streets leading from the Strand, and therefore in the heart of the literary world.

Utopian as many of Tita's ideas were, it was the practical

principle laid down which attracted her to this association. The privilege of adding a string of letters to her name had no attraction for her, neither had the promised recreation; but the first seemed a harmless vanity, and the second even a useful idea as promoting intercourse between those mutually interested in authorship. It was the sound principle of supplying advice, and putting writers into communication with those editors and publishers for whom their works were suited, which commended itself to her.

I once knew a case of delirium in which the sufferer seemed to retain all the faculties of reasoning, with this modification, that he started outside the facts. A state of mind more helpless, more inaccessible, it is impossible to imagine. To the world, Tita would have seemed to be labouring under just such a painful delusion. It may be the world which is delirious—it is a mad world, my masters; but it is usual to assume that the reformer is the madman, unless he wants to take the glebe lands, and cut them up into three acres and a cow for the agricultural labourers.

There is a passage in the beautiful book of 'The Wisdom of Solomon' which the scorners should take to heart: 'Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldnesse before the face of such as have afflicted him, and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall bee troubled with terrible feare, and shall be amazed at the strangenesse of his salvation, so farre beyond all that they looked for. And they, repenting and groning for anguish of spirit, shal say within themselves, This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproch. We fooles accounted his life madnesse, and his end to be without honour. We have gone through deserts, where there lay no way: but as for the way of the Lord, wee have not knowen it. What hath pride profited us? or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and

as a Poste that hasted by. And as a ship that passeth over the waves of the water, which, when it is gone by, the trace thereof cannot be found: neither the path way of the keele in the waves. Or, as when a bird hath flowen thorow the aire, there is no token of her way to be found, but the light aire being beaten with the stroke of her wings, and parted with the violent noise and motion of them, is passed thorow, and therein afterwards no signe where shee went, is to be found. Or like as when an arrow is shot at a marke, it parteth the aire, which immediately commeth together again: so that a man cannot know where it went thorow: even so we in like manner, as soone as we were borne, began to draw to our end, and had no signe of vertue to shew. For the hope of the ungodly is like thistledowne that is blowen away with the winde, like a thinne froth that is driven away with the storme: like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.'

Now, all down the avenues of Time these similes have been applied by the children of the world to the dreamers and enthusiasts; but Wisdom, it seems, would reverse the comparison.

Tita wanted no impossibility. In her own case, she cared not a straw whether writing was paid for or not; but she thought the labourer was worthy of his hire, and if his work was not worth being paid for, it would be well that he should be advised to turn his energies into another channel. Mediocre and worthless work constituted a fictitious supply, and lowered the price of better productions. Something was rotten in the state of Denmark. The idea of Burns receiving some few hundred pounds for all his works, and Goldsmith glad to accept £63 for the copyright of the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' stirred unpleasant reflections. Judicious help and just remuneration would have been wealth, and perhaps life, to both. It is no use to argue that the thriftless will

always be poor—that is beside the mark; they were underpaid. And the evil continues, though not perhaps in such glaring enormity, to this day—from which it must not be inferred that publishers are monsters of avarice; they are commercial men, dealing with a more or less celestial commodity.

It may be remembered that the fabulous price of £10,000 was paid for Lord Beaconsfield's 'Endymion,' and that Messrs. Longmans declined to be reimbursed by the author when the reception by the public-whatever its faults, keen to detect the absence of the 'strong divinity'-made it clear that the transaction was a disastrous speculation for the publishers. We know also that Mr. Arrowsmith, when he found how vastly he had underrated 'Called Back,' threw aside the agreement by which Mr. Fargus was bound. both cases the commercial integrity and generosity are on the side of the publishers. But the same instances form the best possible proof of how fallible is the judgment of the business man. The critic is needed to intervene between the writer and the publisher as much as, or more than, he is needed between the publisher and the public. If there could be established a sort of literary exchange, where the benefit of critical advice could be enjoyed in addition to a thoroughly business-like assistance, why, then we should be one step nearer the millennium!

This was what the Metropolitan Amateur Literary Society offered, and, as it exactly jumped with Tita's idea, she wrote to Mr. Ulysses Grayling, and was duly enrolled a member. She did not do this with the simple faith which had actuated her in joining the publishing company, but rather as a promising experiment.

'Asphodels' being disqualified, she forwarded to the society, or, rather, to the secretary—for the society seemed to consist of patrons, secretary, and members—the manuscript of a short story, 'Double or Quits?'

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Tita awaited the issue patiently. She had learnt by this time not to beat her wings against the cage, but to sit down to hard work. She employed the interval in writing another novel, which was to follow on the heels of 'Double or Quits?' when that work should have infallibly reached the editor or publisher for whom it was suited.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

### AT LAST!

'There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'

Julius Casar.

It was well that Tita had learnt to wait patiently, for no help reached her from the promising society. Either the excellent principle would not work, or the profession was jealous. Anyway, her story was no nearer getting published lying at Mr. Ulysses Grayling's office than it had been stowed away in the secretary at home. However, she devoted herself to the new plot in the meantime, undeterred by her many disappointments, and worked away as if success were assured. Perhaps she was sustained by some prophetic instinct, for the story she now wrote was the one which opened the door to fame.

She still drew her inspirations from her rustic surroundings; but the scheme of 'The First Love of a Middle-aged Man' was more comprehensive, and the style less didactic, than that of either 'Asphodels' or 'Red Wine.'

The hero, Paul Pommary, the middle-aged man, while a Californian gold-digger, forms a friendship with a young man named Barnicle, who had emigrated from the West of England during one of the spells of hard times which had visited the agricultural and mining industries. This young man Barnicle, having amassed a considerable fortune, is

killed by a desperado in a brawl about allotments, and Pommary returns to England to seek the relatives of the murdered man. His adventures in this quest form the subject of the narrative.

The plot required considerable study and concentration, and Tita took longer to complete the work than usual. By the time she had finished, all hope of assistance from the Metropolitan Amateur Literary Society was over, and she was still crying, What shall I do?

She had no choice but to fall back on the plan she had proposed for disposing of 'Asphodels' before Olivia's interference had upset her scheme. A list of publishers to whom she intended to send the manuscript in rotation, if Fate denied an early disposal, is still extant. She selected Mr. Whitworth, of Covent Garden, as the first to whom to forward 'The First Love of a Middle-aged Man.' Perhaps it was sympathy which made him accept it. Or it might have been that the hour and the woman had met. Or it might have been that her writing had now reached the point of excellence which ensures a publisher's acceptance. Or it might have been that Mr. Whitworth, a man of literary tastes and pursuits, had heard, and not forgotten, the rumour about Miss Storck's ability. Anyway, the book was accepted.

After so many years of fruitless struggles, Tita's first emotion on reading her publisher's proposals was unbounded surprise. Probably she had never definitely expected to gain a footing in the literary world. In writing she had followed an instinct rather than a conviction, and in all her 'beating up against the wind' she had feared that she was only parting the light air with the stroke of her wings. The habit of resignation to failure was so inveterate that she was absolutely unprepared for success. Fortunately, little was expected of her in this crisis, and in that little Mrs. Storck and Bianca were exultantly ready to share.

The possibility of the book still turning out an utter failure never dawned on either of these interested critics.

And it was, indeed, fortunate that they had lived in an atmosphere of chastened faith, or they would have been unable to bear the sudden blast of publicity and renown which swept upon them.

If Tita's breath had been taken away by the incredible fact that a publisher had accepted the entire risk of issuing a work by an unknown writer, which had no startling quality to recommend it, she was far more staggered by the deluge of criticism which was poured on her production. Had it been voted by common consent a remarkably clever book by an inexperienced writer, she would not perhaps have been particularly surprised. But no two reviews agreed upon any point but that it was remarkable.

The 'Man in the Moon,' in the *Universe*, pronounced the style the most realistic writing which had appeared since Defoe, and cited the thrilling scene on the Californian gold-fields as evidently a sketch from life.

On the other hand, the Smellfungus Review considered it entirely a fancy study, and brought up Alice Barnicle's extravagant credulity in proof of it.

But the difference of opinion went even deeper than that.

- 'Onlooker,' in a double-page critique, pointed out the astonishing merits of the book, and declared the love-passages to be unrivalled in their exquisite purity and pathos.
- 'Her verve,' said the reviewer, 'recalls distinctly the style of Charlotte Brontë, and the writer may rest assured that a most brilliant future lies before her.'

To this eulogy the *Delphic Oracle* uttered a wholesome counterblast:

'The skill displayed by Tita Storck in the delineation of passion is like the sang-froid of the operator who tears back the skin to exhibit the quivering of nerves and muscles. This manner of treatment is, of course, a flagrant imitation

Stranger still was the contrast of opinion expressed by the British Lion and the Rutland Falling Star.

The former said:

'Probably no writer since Sterne has lavished such a power of analysis on trivial details, investing them with the significance and interest they have for us in real life. Take, for example, the amusing scene in which the two Barnicle girls are puzzled over the spelling in that touching little letter to the hard-hearted Aunt Sarah. "There, Nettie, I've sent your love to uncle. By the way, how do you spell 'uncle'?" Nettie looked over Alice's shoulder, and saw the word written "unckl." She knew by the shock her eyesight received that this way was wrong, but she was instantly puzzled as to how it was spelt. Her imagination being tickled, her critical faculty became dissolved in a mere consciousness of the ridiculous. "Ankle, uncle: try 'k,' Alice." Alice crossed out the "c," and added an "e"; but, being used to misgivings, she consulted her Prayer-Book, and after some trouble found the Table of Kindred and Affinity. Her dismay was considerable when she discovered the agile way in which the relationship was evaded. After much laughter, she ran out and borrowed a dictionary, and found the word. "And now to think I have crossed out the 'c,' and left the 'k'!" The idea of referring to the Table of Kindred and Affinity to see how to spell the word "uncle" is deliciously natural, and then to feel its absence "agile evasion," if possible, more so; but we doubt if two girls of twenty and twenty-three ever really could be so puzzled.'

The Rutland Falling Star said:

'A remarkably commonplace book, commonplace plot, commonplace characters, commonplace dialogue, and written with a microscopic exactitude, as trying to the mind as

magnifying-glasses to the eyes. Take, for example, the scene in which Nettie and Alice Barnicle are inditing that commonplace appeal to their aunt and uncle. They do not know how to spell "uncle," and while Alice searches in the Prayer-Book, Nettie's "imagination being tickled, her critical faculty becomes dissolved in a mere consciousness of the ridiculous." Such a stilted description of an impossible stupidity we do not remember to have met with.'

Perhaps it will be unnecessary to remark that the Barnicles, with their impossible stupidity and extravagant credulity, were next-door neighbours of the Storcks, and that it was Tita's dictionary which had been in requisition.

Tita had requested that all notices—at any rate, all unfavourable ones-should be sent to her. In making this request, she had been actuated by the supposition that she should learn what were the weak points of her composition from the remarks of the critics. Far from resenting the intervention of criticism—as is the evil fashion of the present day—she was quite prepared to welcome its precious balms. She was naturally too noble-minded to take the cheap assumption that critics are men who have failed in other fields of literature as a Gospel truth. If they succeeded in criticism, why should the world concern itself about where they have failed? How few the careers which pass along a primrose path from tentative success to brilliant triumph! It did not require any great effort of her mind to see that the critic's rôle cannot be the sayer of smooth things. The dual function of criticism, to educate the writer as well as to guide the reader, was clear to her; and she resented, as small-minded, the suggestion that the critics regard success with virulence, making an idol of Stevenson, and allowing no other to 'lie near him.' The instance of Stevenson alone proves a magnificent justification, and it remains to be seen whether the easy successes of to-day will eventually disprove the critics' judgment. In any case, outspoken comment

need not be taken as discouragement. If 'to err is human, to retrieve divine,' what office can be of more noble usefulness than the critic's?—whose business it is to point out where the writer fails, and suggest how he may amend. At the present day, it is of immense importance to literature that criticism should be kept above the level of mere advertisement, in the interest of the reader as well as the writer. The growing demand caused by the spread of education throws a new responsibility on the critic. The vast mass of new readers, with the insatiable appetite of all young things, must be cultivated to appreciate the best, and the new writers which the altered circumstances raise up must be taught to respect the eternal canons of art. Mere descriptive platitudes can never serve these ends, and it behoves all who love their 'goddess great' to strengthen the hands of the critics by as much loyalty and docility as human nature will permit. Tita rather erred on the side of regarding all experience as so much schooling, and she was eager to be guided aright. She had regarded the critics as a body of gifted men, who filled their position by virtue of their consummate talent for literary analysis, their correct taste, and (lastly and leastly) their own abilities for composition. She was now bewildered by the diversity of opinion they expressed. They could not all be right when they flatly contradicted one another. Their verdict was no more infallible than that of any other mortals. So vanished another illusion of her youth.

It required all Bianca's powers of persuasion to convince her that a book which made such a stir must be a success.

Of the fact that the book was making a stir there could not be two opinions. The local papers, rejoicing in the acquisition of so much fame by the district, unearthed the memory of the late Herr Storck, and kept the ball rolling merrily.

Friends from far and near offered their congratulations.

One letter, though far from congratulatory, gave Tita great gratification. It was from the faithful Ann Jenkin:

'MY DEAR MISS TITA William where up to Plymouth drilling and he went aboard the Billy Ruffian were sum gentlefoax haxed he were he come from he sed he come from Eyelets but he where Penborne born and rared then they haxed he hef he knowed this here Miss Storck wot Miss Storck sez he Miss Tita Storck sez they wot rote the book he sez yes he knowed Miss Tita man and boy nigh upon thrity yer then they hacksed he a lot more things whot he answired to the Best of his beleaf well he hadn't long been home wen in comes Passon he hant been very friendly lately Becos we had the baby christened to chapl wot were a mile nearer than church were however in he come and sez he you come from Penborne Do you know this here Miss Tita Storck wot rote the book we sed the truth and we cant see wot Harm there is in riting a book but we send these few lines to let you know wot passed and hopes it finds you well as we or.

Tita would gladly have known who the inquisitive gentlefolks on board the *Bellerophon* might have been, but that did not affect the fact that her name was becoming a household word.

Her friends were moved with a keener delight than they would have shown at any triumph of their own. Mirry and her husband went about glowing with satisfaction. The former, indeed, surpassed herself in her joyous enthusiasm.

'To think of its coming to this, after all!' she exclaimed. 'There is no guessing what one may come to. It's like the old riddle: If a bushel of coals costs sevenpence, what will the poker and tongs come to? Who can tell? However, if there is one thing I hate it is riddles; I can never see either wit or wisdom in them, and I am afraid to say so, for

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fear somebody will say: "The other donkey did." And Tita has been so patient all these years, so useful and unselfish, nobody would ever have thought her a genius; but "appearances are deceptive," as the man said when they found the trout in his milk. No one can doubt now that she is wonderfully clever. I only hope we shall not get our heads turned over it.'

In Penborne the éclat was positively painful. Everyone paid his homage with the evident apprehension that she would write him down an ass. But behind her back they freely canvassed the fact that they had always said so, and in proof called up Mr. Briggs's prophetic utterances about Olivia's marriage.

### CHAPTER XIX.

#### CONQUERING AND TO CONQUER.

'Toute sage et toute frileuse que vous êtes, on voit bien que vous avez dû avoir votre mois de mais.'—LAMARTINE.

OLIVIA rejoiced in the turn of the tide with more unmixed delight than Tita, and Mr. Sabota joined in her jubilation. This said much for the good-nature of both.

- 'I will confess now,' said the man of letters, 'that when you reported your sister's determination not to place "Asphodels" in Mr. Whitston's hands, I thought she had flung away her chance of success. I did not doubt her transcendent ability, but I thought she had just those fantastic scruples which have ruined more careers than will ever be known till the last day.'
- 'And I will own,' said Olivia, 'that I went through much misery in thinking I was to blame for interfering with Tita's plans. I have been absolutely haunted by regret. But the nightmare is over. You think her chance of fame is secure now?'
- 'I think so. There is great diversity of opinion in high places as to the merits of the book, but everybody reads it. It is the fashion. I don't suppose any character has taken such hold upon the popular fancy since Mr. Rochester appeared—if one may mention such an antediluvian at this time of day—as Paul Pommary. Why, even the men of

eight-and-twenty are willing to put on ten or a dozen years to their age. You are convinced now, I should hope, that Miss Storck can give us character-painting. Her middle-aged man is alive! And even her slightest characters are touched in in a masterly way—the school-girl, for instance, who thinks it a sin to use any expression which is not "pure Anglo-Saxon."

'And aren't the love passages perfect? I sat down and cried over them, the art is so exquisite. But I cannot think how Tita got such ideas. She never had a romance in her life; she dwelt among untrodden ways, where there were very few to praise and none to love. Yet I could not have described such feelings as she does, although you know I have had my experience.'

It was a pet idea of Olivia's that she had made a desperate love-match, and the further the transaction receded into the distance, the more convinced she became on the subject.

- 'I should say it is difficult to judge what experience of that sort has fallen to anyone,' said Mr. Sabota; 'but perhaps genius sees most clearly from the passionless heights. However, I will leave that subject for the married critics to discuss. The book is throughout wonderfully clever, though not, in my opinion, quite so delightful as "Asphodels." That will always be the first and best love of one middle-aged man."
- 'How thoroughly Tita would enjoy your appreciation! I wish she would come up to London, and taste and see what a delicious thing fame is.'
- 'Probably she appreciates fame differently from what we do, but I think if she could be induced to come up now that the affair is at fever-heat, she might consolidate her reputation. Simply invite her, and say nothing about fame.'

Tita was accordingly invited, but, far from accepting the invitation in the expectation of a quiet time, she did so in

the full assurance that Olivia would leave no stone unturned to advertise her and her works.

Olivia was now in a different position from what she had been two years before. Mr. Fotheringay had followed up his victory in the libel case with other triumphs, and, as often happens when success is assured, his 'accompanying circumstances' improved, his rich aunt dying, and leaving him possessed of a handsome independence. This would have justified a change of residence into a more fashionable quarter, but Olivia had become attached to the house in Beaumont Square, and quoted feelingly: 'The heart has many a dwelling-place, but only once a home.' Her ambitions were not nearly so far-reaching as they had been before her marriage, and with her husband her choice was law. Instead; therefore, of fighting for a place on the outskirts of smart society, they contented themselves with the far more delightful companionship of the friends of their poverty.

Janet Cartwright, now a probationer at the London Hospital, often spent her meagre holiday with them; but she belonged to no set at all. 'The world is my parish,' she said; and those who had a sorrow or a want, in any class, were her friends.

She and Mr. Sabota were asked to Beaumont Square to meet the heroine of the hour.

Tita had not been in London since the visit made for Orlando's wedding, and now no two people in town could be calculated to give her greater pleasure.

Mr. Sabota, whose time was, comparatively speaking, his own, was the first to arrive.

Mr. Fotheringay, in high good humour with Tita because at last she was giving real satisfaction to his devoted Olive, came forward to greet him, and, turning round, exclaimed: 'Let me introduce you to my sister.'

'Then, Miss Storck would not come, after all?'

- 'This is Miss Storck.'
- 'That!'
- Mr. Sabota's two little round eyes opened to their fullest extent, while the host and hostess burst into laughter.
- 'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Sabota in confusion, sitting down beside Tita, whose sweet, calm face reassured him.
- 'Never mind,' said she. 'Now we are quits. I had made up my mind that I ought to ask your pardon for the ungracious way in which I declined your help when you offered it; so now, if you think I have anything to forgive, we will exchange accounts and be friends.'
- 'I am sure you honoured me—at least, Mrs. Fotheringay did—by allowing me to see "Asphodels." The obligation was entirely on my side. I assure you I never so thoroughly enjoyed a book in my life. It was the fact that it was so deep, and yet so true, which made me suppose its writer would be older and—and——'
  - 'Uglier than you,' interpolated Mr. Fotheringay.
- 'There would be some excuse for me if I hoped that wits went with ugliness,' said Mr. Sabota candidly.
- 'Good boy,' said Mr. Fotheringay, who thoroughly enjoyed his friend's being taken so completely off his guard. '"Hope to expect with desire." That is right—tell the whole truth; but I am afraid you will not get the prize for modesty.'
- 'I see,' said Mr. Sabota, 'it is no good crossing swords with you. But I only wished to lay claim to the ugliness, and I had formed no idea as to whether the author of "Asphodels" would be plain or pretty; but I did expect to find one who had been fighting the world older and sadder.'

Tita dropped her eyelids. The muscles of her face were contorted for an instant. In that instant Mr. Sabota knew that the frail-looking girl before him had known the earthquake and the fire as well as the still, small voice. His

self-consciousness was at once dissipated. He said kindly: 'I should be glad if you would tell me what your literary experiences were before you wrote "Asphodels." Mrs. Fotheringay seemed to consider your apprenticeship a series of struggles and disappointments enough to daunt anything but the earth's perfection of all mental loveliness.'

'You must allow something for Olivia's intense sympathy. My troubles now seem to me rather like a dream when one awaketh; but they were real enough at the time. impulse within me compelled me to write—to appeal to the world; yet no one wanted my work. I was crying in the wilderness, beating the air. All my endeavours ended in failure. I could have endured my misfortunes patiently. had it not been that the greater part of the literature which came in my way seemed so slight. I imagined the writers of the very thin fiction and bald essays and reviews were reaping a rich harvest. All those papers and magazines must pay someone, and publishing is not a semi-philanthropic institution, like the Greenwich Observatory or the Botanical Gardens. The publishers must live by it, and they do, and flourish and multiply exceedingly. It would be too cruel to suppose that they trade on the misdirected ambition of their clients. I never cared to be paid for my writing myself; but as I should suspect the tradesman who offered me his wares for nothing, I thought it well that work should have its monetary value. But I could never get anyone outside the circle of my personal friends to acknowledge that my writing had any value. I suppose that I have written to every well-known editor in England, and to half the publishers. Once or twice an offer came through some friend. "I will give you a start;" but that system of patronage was exactly what I detested and wanted to discredit.'

'Your troubles seem to me to have consisted chiefly in a fantastic refinement,' said Mr. Sabota. 'What would have become of you, I wonder, if you had been started in life as

I was! My father was a country parson—the Vicar of Hemping, in Wiltshire, a small poor parish, yielding just an income sufficient to keep a large family alive. Some sort of education we all had, for my father was a scholar, and had plenty of leisure; but it was not such as to fit us for any profession or calling. I was turned adrift in London to pick up my livelihood as best I could. I took to literature, because it required no capital beyond the price of a few months' lodgings. The editors did not want me any more than they wanted you—and I had to win my bread! I was glad enough to do the meanest chars for an old college chum of my father's, and for years I could barely keep a sound coat on my back. But, luckily, my skin was thick. You little know the troubles which beset the tyro-professional in literature!'

- 'You were hungering for bread,' said Tita. 'I was thirsting for distinction. Our troubles differed more in character perhaps than in degree. But it was partly because I felt the difficulty which those who could do good work, and required to earn their living by it, experienced in finding a market, that I beat up against a sense of injustice. Every other commodity but thought seems to be subject to the rules of demand and supply. Perhaps we shall see the day when brainwork will be as appraisable as Paisley shawls!'
- 'Empty dreams!' exclaimed Mr. Sabota. 'I wonder what terms you made with your publisher. To be consistent, they ought to be stringent.'
- 'I have made no terms at all,' said Tita, 'except that I am to be supplied with all unfavourable notices which appear.'
- 'You are the most impractical idealist I ever saw,' he said, 'and utterly unfit to fight the world.'
- 'Do not say that,' said Tita brightly; 'I mean to fall on the monster tooth and nail presently. I mean to use my personal and artistic influence—if I have any—for the

world's reformation; that is why I came up to London. I thought I might catch the sympathy of those who would read my books only for amusement, and overlook the fact that some of the lines are written in blood. I would use my influence as a scourge of small cords to clear the temple, and turn my thoughts into a cleansing current to sweep the Augean stables.'

'Things new and old, sacred and profane, no means or ends to be beyond you! "What a beautiful thing is youth!" But is not that giving the patronage you so object to to your own fads?'

'I don't care,' said Tita gaily. 'What you can't catch with a hook and line you must catch with a net.'

'You are gloriously inconsistent.'

'That I never allow. It is art only that I maintain should be self-contained, self-sufficient. In life, in politics, in reform, if you cannot do what you would, you must do what you can.'

'And what about love?' asked Mr. Fotheringay, in his teasing way.

Mr. Sabota, whose bead-like eyes were fixed in admiration on Tita's animated face, noticed an almost imperceptible tremor pass over her at the question. But she turned composedly, as if her brother-in-law's remark had recalled her to existence, and said: 'Olivia, please poke the fire.'

It was not at all a coincidence that she took the question in that way. She had been existent enough before, and it did not draw her out of the train of thoughts she was indulging, but she wanted a moment to study her reply.

'Literary women,' she said, 'do not know anything about love, except as a branch of their art.'

How exactly the reply which Olivia's remark that she had never had a romance would have led one to expect!

Yet Mr. Sabota said to himself: 'She is acting, or I have a good deal left to learn.'

- 'As art, then, love must do what it would or nothing?' hazarded Mr. Fotheringay.
- 'I have said,' said Tita, evading the question, 'that women who write do not have anything to do with it practically.'
- 'That is quite an exploded idea,' chimed in Olivia.
  'Years ago they did not marry, and the men were polite enough to say that it was doubtless because they had gained too much insight into masculine human nature to desire it, though really I expect it was because they were regarded rather as abnormalisms; but now they almost invariably do.'
- 'They are in great demand,' said Mr. Sabota mischievously. 'Times have quite changed since they were regarded as blue-stockings. Emerson says that novelists use as their mainsprings, "She was beautiful, and he fell in love." But we have changed all that. Now it is, "He was fine, and she fell in love." Ideas have undergone a sort of right-about-face revolution. Soon ladies will enjoy their prerogative of taking the initiative, and it will be but natural that the foremost of their sex should set the example.'
- 'I know that you are only making fun,' said Tita, 'or I should challenge such a horrible charge as you insinuate.'
- 'I exaggerated the case certainly, but there was a germ of seriousness in my words. Prejudices are edging round in a way which would astonish our grandfathers, and still more our grandmothers.'
- 'Here comes a case in proof,' said Mr. Fotheringay, as a sharp rat-at-tat announced Miss Cartwright.

Her entrance cut short this philosophizing.

She was a perfect contrast to Tita, though both were types of the woman of the day. She was a citizen of the real, as Tita of the ideal, world. About the same age, she looked ten years older than her more ethereal friend. Her figure was *sveldt*, her complexion 'red as a rose,' her whole air was vigorous, and somehow in her straight cloak she re-

minded one of the jolly priests who 'laughed ha, ha!' She was a warm-hearted, practical woman, whose idea of reform was taking petticoats from the rich to clothe the shivering, and employing the ennuyées in making soup for the starving. She was in no way beautiful, having no graces of mind or person, and yet she was intensely lovable. She had no morbid passion for 'cases,' and yet there was no nurse in the hospital on whose nerve and tact it was safer to rely. She was never depressed, and kept in excellent health with the least possible amount of rest and sleep.

She had entered warmly into Tita's success, and offered her congratulations heartily.

'Of course, I always knew you would set the Thames on fire some day, and I hope you are happy with the stir your book is making. I haven't had time to read it yet, but I know what it is all about. Papsy gave me an extract when I was at home about the young lady who drank her soup from the side of her spoon with an air of conscious merit, which he said he was sure must have been meant for me. The irony of his joke was rather too broad, as I never have time to use a spoon for myself; but I know dozens of girls just like that. I very much wonder at your idolizing a middle-aged man, though. If anybody embezzles the bank funds, it is always a middle-aged man. If anybody runs away with a Chancery ward, it is always a middle-aged man. If anybody knocks out his wife's brains with the heel of his boot, it is always a middle-aged man.'

Janet paused, out of breath, and Mr. Sabota rather hurriedly took his leave.

'Poor Sabota was afraid you would ask him his age, and put him in the obnoxious class,' said Mr. Fotheringay, when the door had closed on the departing guest, 'and he was not prepared for that on the very first night of his acquaintance with Tita.'

'What nonsense you talk!' said Janet. 'You have been

teasing me for the last twelve months about this grizzly Bohemian, and now you mean to begin on Tita. It is just the way to make her turn against him.'

- 'I hope,' said Tita severely, 'that I have too much sense to be influenced by such ridiculous suggestions.'
- 'Well, at any rate,' said Olivia, coming to her husband's rescue, 'you did appear to get on together remarkably well, considering that you did not begin your acquaintance in the happiest manner.'
- 'Of course, we sympathize with one another. He likes my books, and I mean to like his. I am a writer, and he is a critic, and we both understand that.'

Janet thoroughly enjoyed this sharp-shooting. Hospital training too often narrows the sympathies, but it had not done so in her case. She still kept touch with the outer world, and was as familiar as ever with the doings of society.

'By the way,' she said abruptly, 'our mutual friends, the Carlyons, seem to be in a very unpleasant position. They have spent their money, and have nothing else to fall back on. Gladys is fretting herself out of the world for vexation, and nothing Mr. Carlyon can do can set matters straight, they say. Of course, as soon as the money began to run out, people began to recollect that he was a parvenu, and to pity her as a victim. The wonder to me is that he does not leave her! Don't be shocked. I am not advocating desertion. But when a man is surrounded by discomfort and ill-temper at home, and looked at askance when he goes abroad, I think he is likely to feel desperate. You all know how Mr. Carlyon hates unpleasantness. His life must be a martyrdom at present. Lady Vandemon stands by him through thick and thin, and I suppose her generosity must keep things together. The experiment of matrimony has been a most dismal failure for both of them. advise you, Tita, to write a treatise against marriage.'

- 'On the contrary,' said Tita, 'I am going to write in favour of it.'
  - 'Well, believe me, it is out of fashion.'
  - 'I dare say; but it ought not to be.'
- 'If you are going to remodel everything which is not as it ought to be, you will require the strength and perseverance of Hercules. There is the crying evil, "Keeping up appearances"; begin with that. Then there is the growing foppishness of the men, and the go-aheadedness of the women; each deserves your withering sarcasm.'
  - 'They shall have it.'
  - 'You will be the greatest reformer since Luther!'
- 'I may not achieve very much, but you shall put on my tombstone, "She hath done what she could."

### CHAPTER XX.

IN GROSVENOR GARDENS.

'On peace and rest my mind was bent,
And fool I was I married;
But never honest man's intent
As cursedly miscarried.'
BURNS.

ight heartedly to s

The world he had gone forth so light-heartedly to see had been using Orlando hardly.

At first, in the pursuit of pleasure, he had been visited by qualms of compunction; but each lapse hardened his conscience, and one failing led to another.

Then dissipations began to pall on him, and, like many another, he conceived the project of reforming himself comfortably by a suitable marriage.

With this aim in view, he had not found it hard to fall (sufficiently) in love with Miss Gladys Bullion. Her position, her beauty, her exquisite voice, her amiability—all combined to attract him; and the palpable fact that she was not indifferent to him consummated his intentions.

He had not argued that his wife would find it impossible to live as she had been accustomed to do on his regular income. Money was still, at that time, forthcoming for his wants, and marriage had vaguely suggested itself to him as an economy. There were so many things that with a wife he should be able to do without! The event turned out

rather differently from his expectations. There were, indeed, many things he learnt to do without—his horses and cigars, for example; but the grand total was sadly the wrong way.

Mrs. Carlyon was not positively extravagant, but she was incapable of self-sacrifice. She had no fortune herself, but had been accustomed during her brief maidenhood to a most luxurious mode of life. Lady Vandemon had supposed it certain that a beauty so far surpassing her own should draw a bigger prize in life's lottery than she had done. She had not entirely approved of Orlando as a suitor, but she had imagined his fortune to be four times what it really was, and had not the heart or determination to oppose Gladys's evident choice. Mr. Bullion was not sorry to bestow his daughter where she had invested her heart, the settlements being satisfactory, and his son was only too glad to get for his sister a husband who could 'bleed.' Orlando, however, did not submit to 'bleeding' with at all a good grace, and Mr. Bullion was one of the first to remember that 'Carlyon was an upstart, nobody knew what, you know. His grandfather worked in the mines of Siberia or somewhere.' evitable breach was a source of much pain to Gladys, who loved her brother with a blind devotion. One disappointment led to another, and before the year was out the dream was over. It was a foregone conclusion that these two young people, both inexperienced and both open-handed, should soon be in real straits for money.

Orlando, on his marriage, would gladly have gone in for retrenchment, but his will was not strong enough to compass this, and he soon found that he was not such an important personage as he had imagined. Gladys's love waned in the face of difficulty, but she continued to wear the garb of virtuous endurance—'she wore it threadbare,' Janet Cartwright remarked. This virtuous endurance was a strong sword in her hand, both at home and abroad.

Orlando had married with his eyes deliberately open, but

he soon found it convenient to live with them deliberately shut.

Gladys would have her way, and though that way brought little pleasure to herself, it was a very expensive one.

Orlando was certainly to be blamed for not having clearly stated his position to Lady Vandemon or Mr. Bullion, but for his mistaken estimate of his wife's character he had to thank the ways of modern society. It was impossible that he could form any idea of her capacity from their intercourse before their engagement. So they were mutually deceived and mutually disappointed. Gladys had the keener sense of being aggrieved, because she was the less experienced. She could not stifle the reflection that she might have done so differently, and though she had loved her husband too well to cherish the idea that he was in any way beneath her, the pity of her friends was not without its sting. The direst effect of it was to make her perfectly inaccessible to all reasoning and expostulation from Orlando.

Difficulties thickened. It was almost impossible to meet the daily expenditure. Any idea of regarding any portion of his property as capital—save the sum settled on Gladys as her jointure—had long since faded. What had been easy to realize had been realized as pressing necessity arose, and what had been hard to realize had only been reserved till the next demand. Every alienable possession or interest had been sold or mortgaged, and now ruin stared them in the face.

For the hundredth time Orlando pressed the absolute necessity of a thorough change. Broken-hearted in the midst of comfortless luxury, it seemed that resignation could scarcely be a sacrifice. What was the use of a fashionable house when their fashionable friends had deserted them? What was the use of a troop of servants when the next turn of the wheel might bring in the servants of the law? What was the use of Queen Anne furniture and costly

bric-à-brac when the evil days had come and they had no pleasure in them? How empty all these things seemed when regarded as purchased at the expense of youth and happiness!

Orlando was forbearing with his wife, for he knew that ruin bore more hardly on her than on him, for he was really a meteor in the social firmament. He had come out of obscurity; into darkness he could return. But for her sake some steps must be taken to ward off a sheer catastrophe.

'We must manage to live in a much less expensive way,' he said, coming in from a bitter consultation. 'I have told you again and again that my fortune has been exaggerated all along, and now we have nothing but the wreck of that left to live on. Let us go into the country somewhere, send away the servants, sell the furniture, and put ourselves out of the way of temptation to spend what we no longer possess.'

Mrs. Carlyon made no response. She had heard the appeal many times before, and nothing ever came of it.

Orlando continued: 'I was mad to suppose I could make £5,000 or £6,000 a year stretch over such a way of living as ours, and I blame myself extremely for my personal extravagance. I have given up my horses, and I am willing to give up anything else but a roof over my head. And, willing or not, it will have to be done. If we do not give up our house and furniture, the bailiffs will take them from us.'

Without raising her eyes from the novel she had been reading, Mrs. Carlyon replied fretfully: 'I don't care; they cannot make me more wretched than I am.'

She was no longer a beauty. Her perfect features were left to her, but all that she could lose she had lost. The bloom of health, the radiance of happiness, the exquisite niceness of well-arranged hair and becoming accessories, were utterly gone. Even her fine figure had ceased to be her pride, and wrapped round from morning to night in an

amphibius garment, neither gown nor dressing-gowon, she was no more graceful than a scarecrow. I doubt if those straw statues at Genoa, well draped in white calico, were not more graceful than the fine woman who has lost the interest in being well dressed. She was no longer admired of all admirers, and the love which she might have kept was not a stimulus sufficient to keep alive even her vanity.

Her careless mood further irritated Orlando, already sad and distracted.

'You seem to care for nothing,' he said sharply, fixing his dark glance on her in real anger. 'You will neither give up your extravagance nor surround yourself with something like home until the crash comes. It is as well our children do not live.'

Gladys had cared little enough about her children, but the ill-timed shaft came as a further proof of Orlando's indifference and want of consideration.

She burst into tears.

Orlando repented of his thoughtless cruelty as soon as committed, but he was so tired of these scenes.

He sat down beside his wife on the sofa, and drew her head on his shoulder, she yielding to his caress, but without one spark of answering tenderness.

'Forgive me,' he said, as he kissed her faded cheek, 'for what I said; I am distracted at our position. But only let us face it with courage, and we may yet be more really happy than we have ever been.'

But Mrs. Carlyon only meekly wiped away her bitter tears. Orlando was in despair. Already Lady Vandemon had helped them more than they had any right to expect, and it now seemed that they must go on till the final crash came, and then live dependent on her charity, or starve.

Fate, however, had not this in store for them.

One day Orlando found himself a 'desolate consort—the father of the dead.'

The blackest night was around him as he turned away from his wife's grave.

Youth, fortune, friends, love—everything was gone. What a wreck he had made of life! What a maddening record of folly and sin he had to look back on! Not one ray was there to cheer him in the past or in the future.

Blank misery succeeded to the restless torture in which he had been living. The few remaining acquaintances who had hung round him for his wife's sake inspired him with aversion. There was no ignoring the fact that Gladys had died broken-hearted. Blame himself as much as he would, he felt her friends, now she was dead, must naturally blame him more.

Disappointed, dejected, hopeless, reckless, what was to become of him?

### CHAPTER XXI.

#### 'MISCHIEF STILL.'

'He was at one of those lawless moments which come to all of us if we have no guide but desire, and the pathway where desire leads us seems suddenly closed; he was ready to follow any beckoning that offered him an immediate purpose.'—Romola.

And what did become of Orlando when he found himself once more cast upon the world, like a mariner upon a stormy sea, with neither pilot, chart, nor compass?

To his credit be it said, before we chronicle his darker doings, that the first use he made of his freedom was to pay his debts with the money which, by his wife's death, came once more under his control.

This duty to society fulfilled, he bade farewell to the empty pleasures and delusive shows for which he had bartered his fortune and his self-respect. No philosopher ever felt more bitterly that all was vanity and vexation of spirit. The golden apples had proved ashes, and the whole feast had been nothing but an idle dream. Or this worse than a dream: that it had disorganized his character, and left him incapable of work, or even repentance.

In this awful midnight darkness of the soul men say always: 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' The uses of adversity are sweet alone to those who have strength to conquer their fate. The weak, the vacillating, 'give that the cruel storms of misfortune silence their 'dissonant strings' for ever.

Orlando was weak, and the bitter experiences of the last few years had corroded his nature. He had, with the exception of a few sharp bursts of temper, behaved to his wife like a gentleman; but all the while his disappointment and disgust were sapping his disposition. His good humour, his lively sympathy, his magnanimity, were either being destroyed or rusted over. A nice sense of justice, which had formerly distinguished him, was lost in the sweeping conviction that rank was mere pretension, and integrity nothing but well-directed selfishness. In this frame of mind he would have regarded proffered friendship as insolence, and from being everybody's friend he easily came to be nobody's acquaintance. He could not go back to the companions of his youth, for some were dead, some were gone, and some were changed. He could not fly from London, with its pulses of sin and woe, for nowhere on earth could he find less oppressive or more complete solitude, and the rush of its life was a vital necessity to his feverish mood. He would go back to the inexpensive quarter he had known in the days, so sad at the time, so sweet to look back on, when he had struggled through his wearisome duties at the shipping office. His mind was too tossed about by disgust and restlessness to be capable of work, but the fragments of his fortune would support him as he now cared to live. A certain interest in the mine, which was inalienable and dependent on the profits of working, offered a precarious source of revenue. He could learn to starve when bread was not forthcoming, as well as another.

It was inevitable that Orlando should seek distraction in some form of amusement. He would have preferred the opera and the theatres, but for many reasons these were now inaccessible to him, and he found substitutes in the music-halls and dancing-rooms. Conscience slept, or was

gone on a journey; but a despairing unrest demanded diversion, excitement. An unquenchable egotism demanded a particular interest—not the mere diversion of the spectator—and Satan, or fate, or chance, or opportunity, waited to supply it. A straw would have made him a Socialist, a revolutionary, but that bias was not given. Another broad gate was open to him.

One night at a mixed entertainment of music and dancing his notice was attracted by a pretty, bright girl, whose face and figure had a freshness and energy which told plainly that she came from the country. Her clear dark complexion was tinged with red, and her large brown eyes, over which her black-fringed lids now and then dropped modestly, were fine beyond comparison. For all this there was nothing of simplicity about her. Her movements were animated and graceful, and clearly her senses were vehicles of pleasurable sensations. She might be a girl in a factory, or she might be a servant temporarily out of a place; but something about her said that she worked for her living. Her beauty and evident enjoyment made her remarkable amongst a company consisting chiefly of the pale, apathetic workers of London. The harmless entertainment was a pass-time for the others; it was a pastime for her. Whether she moved lightly round in the dance, or listened to the apoplectic Frenchman who during the intervals performed on the violin, she was thoroughly alive to the pleasure. She was the incarnation of high health and spirits.

As Orlando watched her movements, it happened that her eyes occasionally met his. To say that she now and then shot a glance at him would be very inaccurate; her look rather hovered over his.

The impulse to speak to her grew. This was easily enough to be done, though Orlando came to watch and not to join in the recreation. Etiquette was not strictly observed, though decorum was. All the introduction

necessary was easily supplied by picking up a pocket-hand-kerchief.

'Let me make room for you against the wall; you must be tired,' he said, actuated partly by the genuine wish to be of service to her.

She made him the ghost of a curtsey; not a would-be fashionable bow, but a respectful inclination, such as perhaps her grandmother had taught her to make to her betters in some quiet rural home.

Very few words passed between them, but Orlando discovered that she had a soft, sweet voice, with the slightest Northern accent, and that her laugh was musical and infectious, and close by it was noticeable that her dress was better in quality, and less meretricious in make, than that of the girls with whom she seemed to associate.

Very soon a rough-looking boy, who called her 'Liz,' carried her off to join in a dance, and as it was getting late Orlando went out.

He was determined he would see the girl and speak to her again. He did not ask himself if this impulse was not discreditable. He had ceased to exercise himself in introspection, and impulse was his law, and the only restraint his taste.

He paced up and down the pavement, watching the audience leaving the hall.

He recognised Liz as she came out amidst a group of young men and women. He hesitated a moment as to whether he should follow her, or give up the quest. Chance, however, decided for him. Liz separated from her companions at the bottom of the steps, and with another girl of just her own age, which might be twenty-three or twenty-four, came in his direction.

She knew him at once, and showed no surprise when he accosted her.

He asked her several questions as to where she lived, if

she was going to walk, and if she had to go alone. She answered frankly, and gave her address, adding that 'she might not be there long, as it was only lodgings.'

Eventually Orlando arranged to see her again next evening.

The latter part of this conversation was overheard by a policeman on duty who had come up behind them, and as the girls departed, he faced Orlando, and, touching his helmet, remarked: 'This will want covering up, gov'nor.'

A year or two before, Orlando would have felt an impulse to kick the man into the gutter; but the cares and pleasures of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, had choked such emotions, and, without a moment's hesitation, he took out half a crown, and the policeman, again touching his helmet, turned on his beat.

From that moment the affair became an intrigue.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

#### DRIFTING ON AVERNUS.

'True, it is inseparable, from the very nature of a desire, that there must be some enjoyment or other at the time of its gratification, but in the case of these evil affections, it is not unmixed enjoyment . . . in this, and, indeed, in every malignant feeling, there is a sore burden of disquietude—an unhappiness tumultuating in the heart.'—DR. CHALMERS.

LITTLE more than four years before, Orlando had exclaimed that he could not take his way along the Whitechapel Road if it led to Paradise, and now, on a late autumn evening, he turned his back on the west, and strode along that very highway.

Behind him was a lurid sky—one of a series of magnificent sunsets, such as London has seldom known, which bathed the grimy masonry in a fierce, unearthly light. Many beheld those portentous sunsets with awe, and traced in them something of the supernatural, and most who watched them will never forgot the red glare of the sky and the angry reflection of the earth. Were they not like the frown of Him whose eyes are like a flame of fire?

Orlando was not superstitious, or he might have paused to wonder what the wrathful veil of purple and crimson clouds which hung over the Metropolis signified.

He resolutely turned his back on their glories, and faced the gray east. Pools, indeed, lay on the broad roadway, reflecting the western sky, red as blood, but he hardly noticed them.

It must not be supposed that there were cruel, hard thoughts in his heart, or that he was coolly planning the destruction of another. His heart was blank, waste, and desolate. He had no plan or purpose for the future. He had decided nothing beyond that he would see this girl again whose freshness and vivacity attracted him.

What were his thoughts, what the direction of his will, as he marched with regular steps along his eastward way, it would be hard to tell. He thought something of the sunset, something of the length of the way, something of the sordid locality to which he was bound, something of the little crying child he picked up from the gutter.

The lamps were lit as he turned off the Whitechapel Road into a narrower street, which was still a fairly broad thoroughfare. Here the passers-by began to have the peculiar, depressing look noticeable in the denizens of the East End. Except that now and then a policeman passed, it seemed like marching into another world. The women were clad in rags of indeterminate hue, the men carried odd-looking parcels—boots, sheep's liver, workmen's tools, fish—and everywhere children abounded. Leading off from the main road were courts and blind alleys, with clothespoles and lines, from which depended grimy and misshapen garments, the whole looking in the twilight like the masts and cordage of some stranded wreck. It seemed like walking into the centre of squalor and misery. He had to ask his way, and the natives looked at him with suspicion. he looked on them suspiciously, it would have been excusable; but he showed and felt no shadow of fear.

He picked his way through a labyrinth of cross-roads, and found himself at last in a street with a comparatively deserted air. There were warehouses in it instead of publichouses, and at night these were as quiet as churches. The

dwelling-houses were as wretched as any he had passed. He would scarcely have expected to find Liz located in a district like this, but perhaps she was poorer than she looked, or in temporary straits. At any rate, there could be no mistake. This was the street she had said.

With difficulty he made out the number on a battered door, which looked as if a hard kick would send it in. Probably there was not much inside worth the trouble of stealing. In a window almost level with the ground, and directly under a lamp-post, were a few oranges, and a card with the scarcely-decipherable legend: 'Lodgings to let.'

Orlando knocked with the head of his cane.

A hideous old woman appeared with a paraffin lamp, which flared in the draught of the doorway, making her look older and more hideous than she really was.

'Do yer want Liz?' she demanded, without waiting to be spoken to.

Orlando replied: 'Yes.'

She then called: 'Don'l! Don'l!'

And an old man appeared, who acted as factotum, now that his day's professional work—selling oranges in the neighbouring road—was over.

She gave him the lamp, and bade him, 'Light the gentleman upstairs.'

This was a very necessary precaution, as the steps were rotten and broken away in holes here and there.

At the head of the stairs was a cupboard, from which the door had been broken off, in which shavings, lamp-oil, and odds and ends were evidently stored.

The old man knocked at the door at the side of the cupboard, and a sweet, merry voice said: 'Come in!'

As the door opened, a low room was displayed, very indifferently furnished, with a curtain running across, probably screening off bed and washstand. For one moment Orlando felt a sinking, sickening sensation, caused by the squalor of the whole place.

He then perceived that Liz, as bright as ever, was standing beside the stove, in which a fire was burning, and that the girl who had been with her the night before was seated in a chair by the window.

Liz came forward coyly, and offered him the chair she had been sitting in. There were only two in the room.

'These are very poor lodgings for you,' said Orlando, looking around for something that would serve the purpose of a seat.

He could not sit down and leave a woman standing. The other girl did not move or show the slightest interest in what was going on.

Liz turned a box on its side, and seated herself with an appearance of ease, saying cheerfully: 'Oh, I dare say I shall soon get another situation, and this place is not so bad as it looks.'

'How did you come to be placed in such a position? How do you come to be out of a situation?' Orlando asked.

It was not hard to put direct questions to Liz.

'I came up from the country as nursemaid to a family that have gone abroad since, and I thought I would see if I could not get a better place next time, and now I don't know how to set about getting any at all. But when I have spent all my money, I can sell grandfather's watch. It isn't any good, as it never kept time since I can remember, and it won't even lose or gain to depend on. And when I have spent that money, I can pawn grandmother's knitted quilt. She would break her heart to think of it, but I don't suppose she will be any the wiser.'

And she laughed merrily.

'Can't you go back to your grandparents in the country and get a place near them?'

- 'No; I hate the country. And grandfather is dead, and grandmother is gone to the workhouse.'
  - 'Then, you have no friends?'
- 'I suppose my mother is somewhere; but when I was little she left me for grandfather to beat or pet up, as the fancy might take him, and now I don't know what is become of her, and I don't much care.'
  - ' Poor girl!'
- 'You needn't pity me. The old Irishwoman downstairs is going to get me a place some time, and, of course, she won't try till I have spent my money. It isn't in nature that she should. But I don't hurry myself. Something is sure to turn up.'

Much more passed between them, and Orlando found the girl brave, good-tempered, shrewd, piquant, and altogether charming. He did not discover that much of her coyness was slyness, and that much of her courage was boldness. She dispelled his depression, and she charmed away dull time with her merry talk.

She came to seem a necessity, and he found his way again and again to the dismal tenement.

From one little step to another was such an imperceptible downward course. From the moment he had said in his heart, 'I will follow that girl,' the working of evil had begun.

What a vast slide it should have seemed from being a sad, dejected, ruined spendthrift, to following a poor unfriended girl to her home! Yet how easy had been the descent! and the next step was but a little harder.

Although he felt no hesitation, he was perfectly aware of the enormity of the crime he was committing in inducing Liz to come and live under his protection. That she was easy to persuade was no palliation. The temptation he had to offer—a comparatively comfortable home, no work to do, and the attention and companionship of someone she would consider above her in rank—must be to one who was poor and alone well-nigh irresistible. Add to that perhaps a little real partiality on her part—but that was just what one never could be sure of. Any way, she could brighten his miserable life, and she should walk in silk attire as long as he had a penny to give. She was content with the arrangement; she should never repent it.

Accordingly, Orlando sought lodgings for her in a more comfortable quarter, still keeping to the east, as his means would not admit of any great change.

Not far from where she was before, but in a broader, brighter street, Liz was installed. Her rooms had bowwindows looking into the road, and, if small, were lightsome and airy. They were furnished with such odds and ends as Orlando could pick up cheaply. Liz had a weakness for looking-glasses, and one was placed over the mantelshelf, and another, a quaint concave mirror in an old carved frame, was hung above the writing-table opposite. Liz complained that this latter one made her look hideous, and that it was not pleasant to be followed around the room by her reflection walking on its head. But the curiosity was dear to Orlando, and he would not part with it. Tables and chairs Liz might choose for herself, but in ornaments she must trust him. The books were also of his own choosing; but that did not much matter, as Liz's education had been completed before the Board School era, and she never got much beyond pothooks in writing, and two-syllable words in reading.

Even such small interests as this gave a zest to existence for Orlando, and the happiest and most miserable of his hours at this period were spent in Liz's bright little sitting-room. He could not utterly stifle regret, but it was a case in which there seemed no place for repentance. Misgivings that what was so easily won might be easily lost visited him

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occasionally, but he repressed the suggestion as the worst wrong of any. His apathetic melancholy was dissipated, and his sin seemed to have wrought Liz no sorrow, so far. She was still the same bright, beautiful woman he had met at the dancing-hall. If she suffered from a loss of self-respect, she had the generosity to hide it.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH.

'His relations were sore amazed; not that they believed what he said was true, but they thought some phrensy distemper had got into his head.'
—Pilgrim's Progress.

This while Tita was being launched into an utterly new and intoxicating life. She was perhaps not calculated by nature or training to be popular in the strict sense of the word, but when she chose to make herself agreeable, she gained an influence over the mind of her subject, which in its own way was as useful to her as popularity. She herself declared that she never found it hard to make friends, but that she found them slip easily from her control. Possibly a certain heart-sinking and fainting of the will, superinduced by a sad experience of failure, might really have prevented her keeping her hold on the sympathies of her acquaintances. In her girlhood a reserve—the deadly enemy to popularity had been engendered by the fact that she was not under-Olivia alone had believed in her. The jesting remark that she had dwelt among untrodden ways, where there were very few to praise and none to love, had had a germ of truth in it. It had been generally admitted that Tita was clever and high-principled. What the cleverness consisted in the associates of her youth would have been puzzled to say. They would probably have fallen back on

the old explanation that she 'knew a thousand things.' What a comfortless admission this is for those who 'thrid the labyrinth of the mind,' and have learnt that they know next to nothing! And, then, being high-principled gives little more hold on the sympathies. High-principled people may be popular, but it is in no case because they are high-principled. Besides the revolt which takes place in the feelings with hearing Aristides perpetually called 'the just,' there is something cold and forbidding in the epithet. Neither humanity nor Christianity demands that as the greatest desideratum. A curious reflection, and not altogether a pleasant one.

As she grew older, Tita escaped in a measure from the harshness of youthful prejudices. There came to be two sides, twenty sides, to a question. Her own sad experience, but particularly the true love loved in vain, made her what the Italians call sympatica. Sympathetic she had always been, but sympathy we may feel for a 'horse o'er-driven.' Now she gained a higher emotion, which not only gave her insight into the feelings of others, but made her lovingly tolerant of even their errors. This is the sweet charm which makes a St. Martin's summer in the lives of so many women—a charm impossible to youth and inexperience just as some plants give out no fragrance till they are This mellowness of feeling had softened and enriched Tita's face. The expression which some people those who thought of her chiefly as 'high-principled'might have called hard was gone. It had been nothing but the blankness of an unwritten page, and now it had given place to a look which was both grave and sweet, and if it came with faint wrinkles about the mouth and forehead, it made her distinctly better-looking. Add to all this that she was still young-looking for her age, that she was a brilliant talker as well as a clever writer, and that in manner she combined the most appreciative intelligence with a direct

simplicity, and it will be understood that she was calculated to make a very charming figure in literary society. Everyone expected to see-well, they could not tell what they expected to see, but certainly not a pretty girl, who warbled out retort and repartee in a bird-like voice. Tita was no modern Hypatia, to sneer at the pangs which gave her life as 'tortures fit only for slaves.' A cold wisdom which sat outside the spheres, above the cares and woes of humanity, seemed to her worse than blind folly. Sympathy, love, patience, endurance, were life. She longed to drink that draught freely, not merely from the curiosity of art, but from the thirst of a human heart. When asked what form of martyrdom she would have chosen, she answered quickly: 'To have been Goldsmith's wife!' A woman in every fibre!

A woman—a pretty and clever one, surrounded, too, by the halo of 'being the fashion'-was sure of a dazzling reception in the world. Tita had her own ends to gain by appearing at her best, and she took care to give as little offence as possible with her advanced and far from pleasant views of life. She knew that the pill must be gilded to go down, and kept her 'itch to choose what grates upon the sense' in the background. She had by no means grown out of the idea that too much good taste was the bane of the age, but she knew she was now surrounded by the votaries of art, who would consider this opinion heterodox in the worst degree. The chastisement with scorpions must come, but not yet. And in the meanwhile it was so pleasant to live in an atmosphere of wit and wisdom, though it was the wit and wisdom of the world. That is a peril which besets many a pilgrim on the thorny road of social reform: 'And then, you know, things can't be better than they are.' You really know it is all vanity of vanities, hollow, empty as a dream, but it seems so sufficient, so complete. The skeleton is so well concealed under lock and key that you forget its

The glitter is so much real gold and diamonds, and excellent tinsel and paste, that were it not that old age and death, and certain irrepressible 'unsatisfied longings,' occasionally obtrude themselves, things as they are would make a brave show. Yet this is the life which passeth away like a shadow, like the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day; its hopes, like thistle-down, blown away with the wind, like froth that is driven away with the storm, or smoke that is dispersed here and there with a tempest. For the summer and the sunshine well enough, but when the wind and the storm and the tempest come, no better than a house built upon the sand. How familiar are the similes and metaphors! And yet who really takes to heart the wisdom of a higher life? Is not the word 'enthusiast' an epithet of derision? We fools account his life madness. Knowing that, the enthusiast has to fool us to the top of our bent.

Tita was an enthusiast, and she loved these temporarily sane people, who were straining, not after the Divine wisdom, but at making £500 a year go as far as £1,000, whose philosophy reached only as far as saying: 'Still the human curse has mitigation in the best cigars.' She loved them, and found their ways sweetly seductive, but she did not forget that the way of the world had swallowed up the 'brightest jewel in her crown.' So, though success could charm, it could not captivate her.

She went 'everywhere' and met 'everybody,' thanks to Mr. Sabota, who, notwithstanding his office of critic, was willing to be both disciple and cicerone.

The impressions of this time, which must be full of interest, find no place in her diary. A few random entries stretch over the whole of her first triumphant stay in London.

'It is strange,' she wrote, 'to find that nearly everybody one meets has done something—written a novel or a poem, or painted a picture. And yet I have not met Mr. Ruskin or Tennyson! I was surprised to find that there was nothing striking about —— but a "furiously long nose."

Such entries are very disappointing, but perhaps the rush of life, to which she was so new, was inimical to reflection.

It is interesting to know what impression she made on those who had been before her in attaining celebrity.

'Miss Storck was there,' wrote a well-known gossip, describing a private view in a letter to a friend. 'She is exactly what you would not expect—quite young and pretty, decidedly. She speaks in a rippling way, which is as nearly a lisp as is possible in a strong-minded woman. She is extremely slight, and sits with her small hands—at the end of singularly long arms—tightly interlaced. This is often, I take it, a symptom of nervousness, but not so, apparently, in her case. Her manner is quite composed, and she seems particularly quick at repartee—in fact, she seems to get more clear-headed as excitement grows. This is so contrary to precedent that my curiosity was piqued. I made that bear, Sabota—he writes the "Light and Airy Nothings" in the Laconic, you know-I made him introduce me, and I had a most delightful twenty minutes. If you have read the "First Love of a Middle-aged Man," you will know that it is strewed with quotations and allusions as lavishly as old Burton's "Anatomy." Fancy my astonishment at finding that she had read nothing! I declare I was reminded of the story of the man who passed for a scholar until he confessed that he had picked up all his learning in Playfeather's Almanac. Then, you know, there are passages in the book which one must call rather strong. I wanted to ask where she got at them, but I very soon discovered that she instinctively knew very well where to draw the line in her conversation. She told me that she had always lived in the country-"in Cornwall," she said, as if I should never have heard of that benighted region. She seemed delighted to find that I knew something of Camryn and

Penborne, and that her father was a student of Shakespeare. Anyone else would have guessed that I read it up the day before. She has a great deal of personality—if you will forgive the introduction of that ill-used word—which is sadly lacking in most clever women nowadays, when they all sail round in Gainsborough hats and chiffon. She is decidedly more of a Heloise than a Hypatia—a virtuous Heloise. It is refreshing, too, to find a woman who candidly confesses that she knows nothing. Her mind seems to be all ideas, and she looks at life in the oddest way. I fancy there will be some more delightful books to follow the "First Love." The duchess's portrait was very much admired, the fair original evidently . . .,' etc.

Olivia's testimony goes to prove that at this time Tita was scarcely alive, except while under the influence of intellectual excitement. She ate next to nothing, she slept little, and yet she was never hungry or sleepy. As she could not live on ideas, her friends became frightened.

'I must live at high pressure while I am here,' she replied to their expostulations; 'I will oil the machine when I get home.'

She was indeed living at high pressure, for she felt under a great responsibility. She had written a book that had made a sensation, and she had to live up to it. She had sketched a vast programme of reform, and she had to work 'here a little, there a little.' She had always to keep her end in view.

'Will you give us your confession of faith?' she was one night asked by a fellow-author.

The question was put without much design, but the sudden graveness which fell over her face showed that she took it seriously. Before a roomful of the cleverest people in London, she was asked for an exposition of her views. Her usual mood would have prompted her to answer: 'I believe in utter silence!'

But a smart retort would not do where she was asked for her creed.

'I will tell you what I believe as well as I can,' she said.
'If you like to put me through my catechism, you may.'

The opportunity was too good to be lost. The questioner caught at the idea.

- 'What do you understand by true art?' he asked.
- "True art is an influence in the soul so heavenly that it almost seems akin to grace."
  - 'What is the object of true art?'
- "To present an ideal to the mind—to raise one out of the dust and trouble of everyday way into the diviner atmosphere of a higher wisdom."
  - 'What is the higher wisdom?'
- "God is love, and God is light; whence it results that love is light, and it is only by following the effluence of that light that intellectual power issues into wisdom."
- 'Then, the highest art is the expression of the highest wisdom? What should be the subject of art?'
  - "That is best which lieth nearest; Shape from that thy work of art."
- 'How can love, which is the highest wisdom and the highest art, present the ideal as real?'
- "Love thinketh all things possible. It is therefore able to undertake all things, and performeth and bringeth many things to pass."
- 'It is not impossible, then, that art should regenerate the world?'
- "The word 'impossible' is the mother-tongue of little souls." "All things are possible."
- 'But these articles of faith are the ideas of others. We want your own.'
  - 'I should have been afraid to have given you these con-

victions on my own authority. But they are the very spirit of my creed.'

'What an awful responsibility to hold such views!' exclaimed the questioner; and he asked no more.

The strain of such inquisition on Tita was very visible.

Mr. Sabota, who always accompanied her as guide, philosopher, and friend, was ready to assume her armour—'a world too wide,' he said—and, like a new Patrocles, do battle in her stead. When he had diverted the stream of attention, he said in a low voice: 'Do you know your face is quite white, and your lips gray? If you concentrate your whole vitality in this way, you will vitrify your brain, as Burns did his heart. Then you will die young of paralysis.'

The colour gradually came back to Tita's lips, and the light to her eyes.

- 'You will not frighten me with that,' she said. 'I shall not care if I have lived.'
- 'This excitement is not life; it is disease. And, more than that, it unfits you for work. Tell me: could you go home and write a chapter of "Asphodels"? Could you write it to-morrow? Could you have written it yesterday?"
- 'No,' said Tita sadly. 'Here, in London, I can think only when stirred by some outside influence; but, then, I can remember everything I ever saw or read. I feel that I know things that I never learnt. That is how the prophets must have felt.'
- 'I hope you will stop short at that. Feeling that you know what you have never learnt is perhaps a sensation characteristic of this age; but, pray, don't prophesy.'

With this mixture of banter and common-sense, Mr. Sabota often checked Tita's intensest moods. The argument that excitement unfitted her for work had the greatest weight with her, and she recognised that, if she was to help to regenerate the world, she must, like her forerunners, retire to the wilderness.

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Anything that she could do for the 'busy, thirsty, curious' world in solitude, she would do.

She answered all letters begging for advice or help, telling her own bitter experiences, even where she could not give more solid comfort. She filled in autograph books, 'confessing' that Michaelangelo was the greatest man that ever lived, and giving hours to the senseless questions, Who are the greatest novelists, poets, orators, of the day? etc.

In return she was voted the most complaisant celebrity that had appeared in this generation.

# CHAPTER XXIV.

#### ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

'He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse. Every man's work, pursued steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over the loveless chasms of life.'—Silas Marner.

TITA found it advisable only to visit London occasionally. Its vastness and restless, throbbing life produced an exhibitant and the produced an exhibitant and the produced and time, would, if it lasted, bring on delirium, but was more likely to give way to a morbid reaction.

'For work,' she said, 'I must have the quiet of the country. London life, no doubt, educates in its own way; but there is something about the great solemn sea and the ragged, uncultivated moors which rests and strengthens one. Nature is the art of God.'

As soon as the success of the 'First Love of a Middle-aged Man' was assured, she placed in the hands of her publishers the manuscript of 'Red Wine.' She had hesitated about giving it to the public, but the love which thinketh all things possible prevailed. The tone of the book was unexceptionable; but there were a few critics who, invoking the shade of their beloved *Tom Jones*, expressed the opinion that it would have been better to have left it unwritten. It was impossible to judge of the effect of the book. It made no sensation like its precursor, but it was read and remembered.

This was very speedily followed by 'Asphodels,' which attained an immediate popularity. The reviewers agreed in their verdict that it was 'more mature' than the 'First Love.'

'Of course it is!' said Tita, laughing; 'for has it not been ripening these three years in the cupboard?'

Her reputation was now firmly established, even the critics who had fallen foul of 'Red Wine' and the 'First Love' being the loudest in the praise of 'Asphodels.'

The Delphic Oracle pronounced the style 'pure and graceful.' The Smellfungus Review, generally snappish with new writers and snarlish with old ones, condescended to admit that the thoughts were vigorous, and the tone of the book ennobling. There were no further allusions to Defoe or Sterne or Charlotte Brontë; but even the Rutland Falling Star, with a noble disregard to slavish consistency—useful in literature as well as politics—acknowledged the author as the most original writer of the day.

Tita had now reached the summit of her youthful ambitions, only to find, like Alexander, that nothing was achieved until nothing remained to be conquered. The human mind seems incapable of contentment. The sage seeks the philosopher's stone, the frivolous the fountain of youth, and all, as they move round the world, follow a shifting horizon.

Tita was not discontented, but she was uncontented.

- 'It is clear Tita is not quite happy, somehow,' said Olivia to her husband. 'I hope she will marry. Someone very clever and good would just suit her.'
- 'I suppose, since she has made such a hit with her books, that she may look pretty high,' said Mr. Fotheringay. 'But to be clever and good is not a common lot.'

His wife only answered him by a look.

Quite unconscious of these speculations, Tita pursued the even tenor of her way, indifferent to the matrimonial

possibilities her success had opened to her. She had lived till thirty without anyone making love to her or proposing to marry her, and she had decided it was very unlikely marriage should be before her. She had by no means forgotten the day-dream of her girlhood, and the accounts she heard of Orlando's troubles wrung her heart. But there was a great gulf between them, and he must be the first to essay to cross it. She would have given her life to have helped him, and yet she had to wait, and let him drift into unknown depths of sin and sorrow. How often, in a paroxysm of unavailing despair, had she to cross her hands, and try to feel 'underneath are the everlasting arms'!

Neither was she left untempted in her maiden meditations. Even the glamour of romance hung like a Will-o'-the-wisp about her path.

One evening, during one of her occasional stays in London, she was proceeding southward to visit by appointment a philosophical philanthropist, who resided somewhere in the healthy vicinity of Blackheath. Mr. Fotheringay left her at Charing Cross. Of course, she was very well able to look after herself, though she rather wished her friend the philanthropist had not chosen just the hour when everyone was returning from the City; but she took her seat in a carriage with two inoffensive-looking old men. They at once began to smoke, proving the sad truth that 'things are not what they seem.' This was a nuisance; but they were at the other end of the carriage, and this woman who was going to reform the world hated a scene, so she endured it, unprotesting. At Cannon Street the carriage filled with more business men. A good-looking young fellow came in, and took his place beside her. Opposite her sat a middleaged man, who no sooner found himself outside the station than he also lit his cigar, and shut the window. Presently Tita found the condition of things becoming unendurable, and quietly lowered the sash again. Her vis-à-vis shut it again, remarking: 'It is very cold. I object to the window being open.'

It has already been explained that Tita had peculiarly luminous eyes. She swept the occupants of the compartment with an inquiring glance.

The train was an express, but that did not ensure its getting to its destination in a hurry. It stopped out in the dark in an inconsequential way instead of at the stations. But changing carriages was not an easy matter.

'This is not a smoking compartment,' Tita said, 'and I object to tobacco.'

Neither of the delinquents abated the nuisance.

Tita was quite conscious that her neighbour's wrath was rising, but that he, too, as well as herself, was too well bred to make a scene. She turned away her head with a little air of weariness.

The young man rose, and put down the window with a crash. He then pointed to his vacant place, and ordered the chief offender into it, and seated himself in the draught. His nostrils were quivering with suppressed anger. He was a well-knit young man—to whom a free fight would have come more naturally than passive endurance—and, on inspection, more than good-looking—very handsome indeed.

Tita glanced at him as gratefully as her British instincts permitted. He was intently studying the starry darkness. His incipient moustache and closely-cropped hair slanted away in the opposite direction from the wind in a way to freeze even the beholder's marrow. Tita longed to offer to change seats, but fineness prevented her.

When the train stopped, the young man hesitated a moment, as if wondering whether this unmetropolitan-looking damsel ought to be trusted to herself, and then pushed the door open and descended.

Tita presently did the same, and pursued her way to the philanthropist's, to lay her projects for the world's advancement before him. She was reflecting that chivalry was not quite dead, though very nearly, and ruminating some withering sarcasms anent the subject, when she arrived at the house, and was shown into the great man's presence.

At the mantelshelf, reading his letters, stood the gentleman who had come to her rescue in the train.

Professor Macladghan introduced the young man as 'My nephew, Hugh Templar.'

Mr. Templar was exceedingly abashed at finding that he had done so small a service to so great a personage as Miss Storck; but he picked up courage—casting considerations of dinner to the winds—to see her home to Beaumont Square, and finding her tolerant and sympathetic, in addition to being pretty and clever, he resolved to come again.

On one excuse or another he was a pretty frequent visitor, and before long he proceeded to the length of calling and demanding an interview with Miss Storck alone.

Tita was rather surprised, but concluded that his mind was probably burdened with a poem. She had a decidedly soft place in her heart for good-looking young men who were perfectly well bred and yet natural; and Hugh Templar was a great favourite. She was quite prepared to take great trouble about that poem, or even act as mediator, if he were in trouble with the great man, his uncle, as occasionally happened.

Mr. Templar, though by no means forward, was not handicapped by reticence.

He opened his case by remarking that he was only a clerk in a bank, a fact of which Tita had been quite aware the evening that he sat fuming inwardly while those vile passengers fumed outwardly. It could scarcely be a poem, after all, or even a quarrel with his uncle. He was ambitious; but how could she help him?

She poked the fire into a blaze, and they sat down in front of it.

- 'Only a clerk in a bank with a wretched salary and no great prospect of advancement. I suppose I can hardly hope to be made a manager in less than ten years.'
- 'Not in less than thirty,' said Tita to herself. She wished she knew some way in which she could brighten this dear boy's prospects.
  - 'That is a long time to ask anyone to wait, I know.'

What could he be coming to? Tita looked at him uneasily, and wished she had turned up the gas when she came into the room.

- 'Oh, you must guess what I want to say. I know it is very selfish; but I am always growing older, you know, and if you like I would give up the bank and try something else. In a merchant's office perhaps I might get on faster. I will do anything you like, if you will only promise to marry me.'
- 'It is too absurd!' exclaimed Tita, in astonishment.
  'Do you know I am half as old again as you are?'
- 'That cannot possibly be true!' he cried impetuously; but he was diplomatic enough to add: 'Though it could not make any difference if you were fifty. You are the prettiest, the cleverest, and the best girl I know. And I love you!'

It was a long, long time since Tita had heard words at all like that; but the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and she burst into tears.

The young man of the period is not overburdened with the gift called intuition, but poor Hugh Templar guessed the truth. He, to whom she had been so gentle, so sweet, so adorably kind, was only the shadow of some former friend.

He raised her small hand to his lips, and said: 'Do not trouble to say "No." I understand my fate.'

He found his hat, which, with the rashness of youth, he had felt assurance enough to deposit, and let himself out into the cold, empty square, turning to look at the dimly-lit window with a parting pang.

Tita did not suffer much over this adventure, for, sympathetic though she was, she knew the wound was one which would soon heal.

In truth, this, her first suitor, manfully put the idea of wooing her out of his head. But when a slightly satirical sketch appeared, called 'The Chosen of Adonis,' he softly told himself that he was no doubt the hero, and that there was a very pathetic what-might-have-been behind the farce. Tita's own friends, with unanimous consent, declared the Adonis to be none other than Orlando himself. The general public knew very well that it was 'Bertie, you know.'

This was not Tita's only experience of wooing. A widower with three troublesome children, and very advanced views about sanitation, emigration, and many other 'ations,' made a cut-and-dried proposal that they should go in for matrimonial co-operation; but she firmly declined.

The widower was followed by a needy young man, who was not even a clerk in a bank, and brought nothing but unbounded devotion (his own account) and a very good opinion of himself (her view) to the sacrifice.

The very clever, good man was still on the shifting horizon.

Such love-making did not disturb Tita's serenity, and she continued her work with fervour.

'The Chosen of Adonis' was aimed at the affectation, the moral colour-blindness, the refined egotism, which are supposed to distinguish the young man of to-day. This story was a society novel, and a new departure for Tita. It made no pretence of going deeply into things, but was intended to lightly ridicule the tendency of the age, hoping that the

subjects of the satire would understand that true things are often spoken in jest. Its sarcasm was pleasant—'as good as a pick-me-up,' remarked one graceless youth.

The critics mightily enjoyed the humour, being always ready to join in a laugh at the expense of the 'masher.' The subject gave opportunity for those little side-touches of observation which were one of the greatest charms of Tita's style.

'Her remarks on good looks,' said one reviewer, 'are both true and original. . . . She observes that there are two kinds of personal beauty apart from the spiritual loveliness, which we see rather through than in the body—the handsome, excellence of form and colouring, dependent on external influences; and the fine, rich vitality which seems to infuse itself into its surroundings. The former will often appear at a discount, the latter scarcely ever. The former will be frequently surrounded by the palpably unbecoming, while the latter seems to draw its entourage into harmony with itself.'

'The Chosen of Adonis' was only one of a series of light sketches aimed at the more venial follies of the times. 'Pro Bono Publico' and 'Amazons in Peace' quickly followed it while Tita was in the same vein. The former was founded on the idea of an American writer that much of the general order of society and the happiness of a people depend on marriage being early and universal among them. The latter may be best described in the words of an admiring reviewer:

'This extravaganza is the most amusing thing which has appeared for many a long day. It is no doubt intended as a pendant to "The Chosen of Adonis," but the writer has indulged in a much further flight of imagination. The exaggeration in "The Chosen of Adonis" is nothing more than the distorted reflections of figures seen in the glasses of a lighthouse lantern. In "Amazons in Peace" the world

is represented upside down. Perhaps some sorely-tried housekeeper may get a laugh which is not all pleasure over the passage in which the mistress exclaims: "There is cold mutton and rice pudding for us, but what shall they have in the kitchen?" and settles on lamb cutlets and Italian cream. But it is excellent fooling. . . . Sarcasm wants only a subject, but satire must have an object. The objects of the satire here are not hard to find. In an imaginary community where they have not "the useful trouble of the rain," but are obliged to use wine or salt water for all purposes, the discovery of spring water is of course a startling event, and is described in a most amusing way. A short quotation can give no idea of the humour of the story, but the ecstasy over the element which we treat with the contempt of familiarity is very good, and of course full of intention. "The discovery of a fluid, perfectly colourless and tasteless, refreshing and health-giving, more resembling liquid diamonds than anything else, and indeed supposed by science to be a liquid form of the precious stones, producing neither nausea nor intoxication even with the most delicate, is a subject of interest second to none since the discovery of electricity. Unfortunately, the prohibitive price of the fluid will keep it the exclusive luxury of the rich, unless further discoveries should be made." The serious intention is easily to be discovered, though pleasantly veiled throughout.'

These were indeed gilded pills, and they went down sweetly, but they were not without their effect.

# CHAPTER XXV.

## A MODERN DIONYSUS.

'You! A priest!'

A Foregone Conclusion.

TITA was often called to London by her literary and philanthropic employments, and she was glad of these interludes in her writing, as they enabled her to keep up the friendships, artistic and philosophical, which she formed in her career. Perhaps also there was always alive in her heart the hope which kept Evangeline a wanderer. She could now yield herself to those 'unsatisfied longings' with no sense of guilt. Nothing separated her from Orlando, as far as she knew, but the vast desolate abyss of his indifference. If she liked to fling all the pent-up tenderness of her heart into that abyss, there was now no law of earth or heaven to blame her. Her feelings were almost exactly what they had been on the night that Orlando and she had sat together on the rock 'between the less lea and the mair.' She could go over again the inarticulate dreams of her youth, feel once more the hand pressures, the meeting of eyes, the sweet words of double meaning. Ah, were these dreams? Were they not far more real than the fame and fortune of to-day? Should she not awaken presently with one long trembling sigh, and look up to find that she had been an hour asleep, and that the impotent power and empty fame were the

nightmare, and love and hope the reality? She had not known in those old days what the tenderness and solicitude in her heart meant, but experience had told her that it was the one supreme passion of her life, which unworthiness, neglect, indifference, nothing could kill, always pulsating in her heart, like the sound of the bells, 'loud at times and low at times,' but never still. It did seem hard that such devotion could be conceived but once in a lifetime, and that the chances were a thousand to one that it would have to feed on its own vitality, at once Prometheus and the vulture. Could Nature have meant it to be so? Who knows? As well ask the ways of the wind.

One evening Tita was alone, indulging in mournful, dreamy retrospection. Olivia was out on some mysterious errand; Mr. Fotheringay, now an overworked Q.C., was at his chambers. She was alone with her musings. She could not read; her thoughts slipped off the subject-matter of a book, and left her staring blankly at the pages. Music had no charm for her. One of Beethoven's sonatas, which spoke to her of struggle and misunderstanding and reconciliation and peace, did but work her feelings to a higher pitch, and it was the only movement for which she had endurance to-night. She could not even sew; her hands grew clammy, and she made false stitches, to be tediously unravelled, while she thought bitterly of Penelope's web.

She flung down her work at last, and sat idly gazing at the fire, with her hands clasped in her lap, watching

'The sooty films that play upon the bars
Pendulous, and foreboding in the view
Of superstition, prophesying still,
Though still deceived, some stranger's near approach.'

Her soul went out into the darkness and solitude in a wild, inarticulate prayer, which echoed in her own heart like a shriek of despair.

Without any preliminary sensation she looked up, and saw in the doorway—Mr. Sabota!

Ah, well, art was balm, and he was the physician.

He did not inquire for Olivia or Mr. Fotheringay, but came and took a chair at her side, as if he quite looked forward to an hour's chat about books and critics.

- 'You have been indulging us with some unexpected flights of fancy lately,' he said, plunging at once into the subject which was so dear to them both, without any preliminary flourishes about the early frost or the meeting of Parliament.
- 'Which means,' said Tita, rousing herself, 'that people are disappointed in "Adonis" and the "Amazons"?'
- 'Not at all. Only surprised, just as they were when Tennyson wrote the "Northern Farmer." We had not imagined that such light humour lay in your line.'
- 'It refreshes and amuses me to write these slight sketches. It would kill me to go on thinking as I did while writing "Asphodels"—sometimes when I wrote at white-heat my brain would swim—I should feel absolutely sick and faint, and tremble from head to foot.'

Mr. Sabota frowned.

- 'Never write in that mood,' he said severely. 'Your mind is then overstrung. You may be able to write more easily than usual, but you cannot judge of the value of what you are producing.'
- 'But those are the moments when I feel most clearsighted, just as if my spirit floated up and up till it found the sun a great white doorway, and looked through into infinity.'
- 'Suspect the influence of excitement. It is insanity. Rejoice in the thoughts which come slowly and steadily, perhaps with groans and tears, rather than in those which come by fits and starts, attended by exaltation and trembling.'

- 'You are an unsympathetic Philistine.'
- 'Not that exactly. But I do not like to see you tearing yourself out instead of wearing yourself out.'
- 'What is wearing one's self out?' she demanded, looking up at him.
- 'It would not be easy to put it into words, and, if I did, very likely you would only call me a Philistine again. I will only remind you of what you once gave as an article of faith: "That is best which lieth nearest;" no need to fly to the white gates of the sun. Where were your thoughts, I wonder, as I came in. Were you planning some deep romance?"
  - 'I-I-don't know,' said Tita, dropping her eyes.
- Mr. Sabota enjoyed his ttte-à-ttte with this clever woman, who answered his questions with a mixture of hesitation and deliberation. He had seen her stand unflinching before the cold critical gaze of a hundred eyes. He had heard her utter, without faltering, her confession of faith; yet he could play upon her heart-strings, and send little ripples of feeling across her soul just as if she had been a green, unlessoned girl. It was very delightful.
- 'Better keep to the slighter studies. They do good in their own way. Everyone sees the points of the "Chosen of Adonis" and the "Amazons in Peace"; and "Pro Bono Publico" would do much to make marriage popular, if trade would but revive. That is something, is it not?"
- 'A very small thing,' said Tita, raising her head with something like coldness. 'An idea for those who live in the dust and trouble of everyday life. I like best to aim at something altogether higher.'
- Mr. Sabota smiled. This was so much more piquant to him than if she had blushed and turned away self-consciously.
- 'Then, you do not think highly of marriage?' he demanded, fixing his small bright eyes on her.

It seemed to him that Tita writhed to the tips of her tiny feet, resting on the edge of the fender.

- 'Let us talk only of art,' she murmured; and, looking around anxiously, her eyes fell on an open book. 'Have you read Buchanan's "God and the Man"? If so, what do you think of it? It is a book of which one must think something, if one has read it.'
- 'I have come to be questioner to-night. What do you think of it?'
- 'I was told before I read it that there was "too much suffering in it," which perhaps made me read it with a bias -you will not need to be told that my bias was to see the other way—and I do not mind psychological torture. I would as soon read of pain as pleasure, if the writing is well done. I suppose I am cold-blooded, and "turn a fleckless mirror to the various world." Olivia wept and raged over the "Ordeal of Richard Feveral," and wanted me to burn it, as I did the "Story of an African Farm"; but I said, "No; pain is not poison." Here, in "God and the Man," the pain is not even gratuitous, and the writing is wonderful. I don't know that one ought to call it "style," for the peculiarity of manner seems to be in the thought of the writer rather than in his method of writing. In fact, I should say the words are an indifferent reproduction of the ideas. And why are authors so careless in their composition? I have heard it stated that novelists write badly because they spell worse! If that is an excuse for them. there might be an excuse for their expressing themselves obscurely in that they think vaguely. But where the ideas are clear, there can be no excuse for slap-dash writing. Here, for example,' she said, turning the pages rapidly. 'What is the sense of saying, "Singing . . . as she sang"? Then, Christian's pony goes through some curious metamorphoses at the inn and on the way home. The doctor is invited to ride her back to the Fens, and, when he proceeds

to mount, he is advised to give him his head, and when Christian arrives at home, he finds the pony herself again. Such slips are to me astounding. I can understand an author's writing incorrectly as his thoughts flash out, but I cannot understand his overlooking his mistakes in a second reading. I would as soon have a box on the ear as read some sentences which go through two or three editions. It must be possible to write evenly and clearly, because occasionally it is done. I can only remember to have come across one sentence in the writing of Mr. T. P. O'Connor that I could not see through.'

Mr. Sabota pushed his chair back a couple of inches, and rested his hands on his knees.

'There isn't a line in "Mary had a little Lamb" that I cannot see through,' he said, smiling rather maliciously, while Tita bit her lip. 'And Mr. O'Connor's writing ought to be luminous,' he added. 'There are plenty of "I's" in it. You know the story——'

'Yes, I do,' said Tita warmly. 'When you hear "Mr. O'Connor" and "I," you know what is coming, just as Pope says, when a poet mentions "the cooling western breeze," you know in the next line you will have it whispering through the trees. One could make jokes like that with a sausage-grinder!

She had talked herself into as high spirits as the war-horse in Job.

Mr. Sabota laughed, as he could not sneeze with his brain.

'Where are you going to place O'Connor?' he asked. 'Above criticism?'

Tita patted that part of her anatomy which she supposed to cover her heart.

'Every good woman puts him in her heart,' she said.
'No knight-errant was ever more chivalrous. He is too

good to us, but it is a generosity which makes for righteousness.'

'What an epitaph!' said Mr. Sabota. "Died so-and-so, but lives for ever in the heart of woman. Too good; but with a generosity which makes for righteousness." Yet you have not been A Book of the Week. However, you are not really criticising, only putting off my question, What do you think of marriage?'

Tita froze at once.

'I think nothing,' she said, like a second Ophelia.

A curious clock of beaten brass, on which it was hard but not impossible to mark the time, hung against the wall, and independently of one another the eyes of both sought it.

'Many have held that the married state is detrimental to art, but I do not think the proof goes with the assertion.'

Mr. Sabota spoke thus, quite gravely, and added: 'I know such various spirits as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Alphonse Daudet have agreed in the truth of it; but to think so would be to relinquish one of the brightest illusions of our souls.'

'What is life but a series of lost illusions?' said Tita hurriedly. 'Mrs. Glass did not say, "First catch your hare"; the Duke of Wellington did not say, "Up, guards, and at them!"; Nelson did not say, "England expects every man to do his duty"; the sunflower does not turn on her god when he sets the same look that she turned when he rose.'

Mr. Sabota had never seen Tita so nervous before, and her evasions reminded him of the hunted hare which, 'to overshoot his troubles, outruns the wind, and cranks and crosses, with a thousand doubles.' He did not know what to make of this manner.

You might tell me if anything would induce you to think of marrying.'

- 'You are very cruel,' said Tita sharply.
- 'I do not intend to be; but you will not take anything I say rightly.'
- 'I am sure I have listened with patience, and answered to the best of my ability.'
- 'Now you are angry with me. You misunderstand me. You think me impertinent, but I am very much in earnest. Until I met you I never believed in the possibility of the highest intellect co-existing with the most delicate sensibility. That is why I have never thought of marrying. In you I find everything I could desire in my wife, and if you will take me, I promise you the first love of a middle-aged man.'
- 'You, too!' exclaimed Tita, with a look of reproach. 'I thought you such a true friend; and now you go and end everything by proposing some desirable arrangement.'

The thoughts of this Ariadne had been so full of her faithless Theseus that she had not guessed the tendency of the conversation, and the revelation came as a shock.

- 'We are neither of us so young that we need stand out for all the halo of romance,' interposed Mr. Sabota.
- 'I will have the divinest thing that is, or nothing,' said Tita.
- 'I could not promise you that. I am too old and too world-worn. But you interest me immensely, and I admire your character, even your faults.'
  - 'Thank you!' said Tita scornfully.

It seemed so cruel that this best of friends should spoil everything by pretending to be in love with her; and there seemed no way out of the situation but to quarrel. It was a physical impossibility that she should accept him. It had been very well to have him for a constant companion when it was possible to regard him simply as a friendly critic. But to surrender that dearer thing than happiness, that more precious thing than fortune, herself, was impossible.

Yet he meant well, and was older and wiser than she. Perhaps she should some day come to regret that she had acted so consistently in rejecting her suitors. However, come regret, come despair, she was resolved that no one should reign over her life as lord and king unless her heart could say, This is my master.

- 'Do you remember,' asked Mr. Sabota, with his small eyes nearly closed, 'when Fotheringay asked you, "What about love?" and you said a literary woman had nothing to do with it, except as a branch of her art?'
- 'Perfectly,' replied Tita frigidly. 'But I suppose one may be something besides a literary woman.'

If Mr. Sabota had been in love with Tita, even in the transient way that Hugh Templar had been, he would have known that his case was hopeless. But his feeling was not transient, and it was not exactly love.

'You are thinking me impertinent again in asking such a question, but it occurred to me at the time that you might be in love with someone else, and if that is so, I can understand that with you my suit may be utterly hopeless.'

Tita rose hastily.

'I would not marry you,' she said, 'if there were not anyone else in the world.'

So they parted in anger.

An hour later Olivia and Mr. Fotheringay returned, to find that Mr. Sabota had called, and remained about an hour, and that on his departure Miss Storck had gone to her room.

Thither Olivia pursued her.

- 'I do hope I may congratulate you on securing the affection of one of the best and cleverest of men,' she said, coming up behind the chair in which Tita was sitting.
- 'So you knew what was coming!' exclaimed Tita, with flashing eyes. 'Well, that is quite of a piece with the rest of the affair. This is the first mention I have heard of

affection. I was to have—really, I don't know what, but there was no pretence of affection. Why, even Archie Thurnall, conceited simpleton though he was, did have the grace to simulate devotion! But this cold-blooded creature proposed with an allusion to Sir Joshua Reynolds, and said that the combination of the highest intellect with the most delicate sensibility had sufficed to make him think of matrimony, which means, I suppose, that he imagined he had come across someone at last who was at once clever enough to appreciate his mental superlativeness, and softhearted enough to see his paper aired and his slippers warmed.'

'Well, you need not get into a passion about it,' protested Olivia. 'If you choose to refuse him, certainly you have no right to abuse him afterwards. He is really fond of you, and dozens of girls would give their ears, now fringes are in fashion, to have your chance. He is ugly, and not very young, of course; but think what a reputation he has! So perfectly suited to you, too. However, it is no use arguing on such a subject; but if you prefer some fantastic ideal to the companionship of a straightforward, honourable man, at least you have no reason to resent his having misunderstood you. I leave you to your dreams.'

'I cannot understand Tita,' she said to her husband, when the event was discussed over the dying embers. 'I thought Mr. Sabota so perfectly suited to her, both in taste and circumstances. But I suppose it is written in the book of fate that Tita shall never marry. I did not wonder at her refusing Mr. Macduff, though his position was good, for she always declared that she would never take a second-hand lover; while Bianca, on the other hand, held that it must be best to have a husband who had got "all the foolery" over. It is *impossible* that she can be thinking of Orlando all these years, and after his conduct. Don't you think so?'

Mr. Fotheringay replied thoughtfully: 'I should say not at all impossible. Do you remember the way she treated Templar? One would have thought that she really cared for him, and yet he makes no secret of the fact that he proposed and she refused him. It is a most unfortunate affair, for Tita, genius though she may be, requires a sheet-anchor as much as the most frivolous woman that exists.'

- 'I should think she did! Why, though she is generally so gentle and quiet—never stirred about anything but the world's reformation—she sometimes gives way to the most unreasonable fits of temper. It is no doubt owing to a restless, unsettled state of feeling. If love is the sublime thing she thinks it is, it is lucky very few people get the craving for it. There is a sort of wisdom, I suppose, which is too good for everyday life. I have no patience with these Johnnie-head-in-the-airs.'
- 'And Carlyon seems utterly lost. I thought after that time we saw him in Paris that he would come to this. The wonder is that he ever made such a good figure as he did.'
- 'Don't mention him,' expostulated Olivia, oblivious of the fact that she had introduced the subject; 'the very thought of him puts me into a fever. Such a charming fine fellow completely thrown away. Why did Uncle George leave him that wretched money?'
- 'It was a great misfortune, certainly,' assented Mr. Fotheringay. 'The spending of it seems to have brought him little pleasure, and completely unfitted him for any useful work. He shuns his old friends and acquaintances, and nobody can tell what he does with himself. He lives in some cheap lodgings in a hand-to-mouth way, and resents any inquiries. So the young man who never made an enemy finds himself without a friend!'
- 'I am sure, if he would try to turn over a new leaf, Mr. Peters would take him back at the office,' said Olivia, ready to take sides with the absent ne'er-do-well when he

was abused beyond a certain point. 'And I dare say Lady Vandemon, knowing what a temper his wife had, would forgive all his sins if he would but make himself agreeable. As for Tita, the more I think of it, the more it seems probable that she cannot forget him. But, then, it is against all her principles to tolerate the idea of him. He seems to have every failing that she dislikes, and to have committed every sin that she holds unpardonable. And yet, you know, she has put him in some form or other into all her books. It is easy enough to recognise him in the "Adonis" and in Gregory and Ferdinand. Faulty everywhere, but the object of the intense and delicate love which she knows better than anyone how to draw. And everywhere this charming thriftless young man of the day wins in the end. If she represents him selfish, she works his repentance; if undecided, she puts a special Providence to guide his ways. Really, when one comes to think of it, it scarcely seems quite delicate. But I suppose it is not fair to compare her life and feelings with her writing. She always hated it, but people would do it in a minute if they knew the circumstances, and no doubt they would say that she has been in love with Orlando all through. It is a thousand pities. She can never expect to marry so thoroughly satisfactorily as she would do in taking Mr. Sabota. As far as I can make out, she has not only declined the honour of marrying him, but come very nearly to an open quarrel. See if ever I plan another plot for her welfare!'

## CHAPTER XXVI.

#### THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

'I am Thy son,
... and till I betray'd

Myself, a temple of Thy Spirit divine.

Why doth the devil then usurp on me?

Oh! I shall soon despair, when I shall see

That Thou lov'st mankind well, yet will not choose me,
And Satan hates me, yet is loath to lose me.'

DR. DONNE.

ONCE more we must take our way to the East End.

Liz still occupied, at Orlando's expense, the cheerful rooms engaged for her, and Orlando still came to her for diversion and entertainment. If these two were growing tired of one another, they knew how to veil their change of feeling. Orlando was occasionally morbid, and even Liz's gay spirits could not dispel his gloom; but he was as far as ever from repentance. There may have been a change in Liz, but it was rather the natural growth of opinion than an abrupt transition likely to cause a change in her appearance or demeanour. She had never cared for Orlando—it would have been miraculous if she had—but, as she came to know him better, her strong, coarse nature rose in contempt of his half-hearted, finical viciousness. She was of the class who would give the advice, 'Curse God and die.' Not that she was wholly bad. She was capable of passionate

affection and patient endurance, but her feelings must have strength and stability to rest on. It was plain that Orlando had neither. With his eyes open, he would put his head into the noose, and then turn pale at hanging. The lover for Liz must be able to suffer without flinching. But Orlando had some money left, and while it lasted Liz meant to be externally faithful.

Orlando generally came in for an hour or two during the afternoon, and if he was in the mood for conversation expected to be amused. This was often hard work for Liz, for Orlando objected to her associating much with the factory girls and workmen who had been her companions before he had met her; and, indeed, many of these looked askant at her 'slice of luck.' He never took her himself to public places of amusement, and required her to live a life of seclusion resembling that of the Eastern harems, without its mitigating safeguards. The landlady of the house was a communicative and sympathetic woman, but in profiting by these qualities there was a risk to Liz, as Orlando was as sharp as a detective in scenting discrepancies. things tended to make Liz's life far less lively than it had been in the lodgings with the old Irishwoman. Still, she was as merry as ever, and often enough Orlando came apparently to do nothing but pore over the latest French novel.

One day he entered in his taciturn humour. Perhaps something had occurred in the outside world to annoy him; perhaps he really was tiring of a connection he saw no way of ending. Any way, he was more inclined to read than to talk.

Liz, complaisant to all his moods, took her favourite seat at the window, commanding a view up and down the street. She was an inveterate knitter, and was knitting a stocking.

'It is a sort of company,' she said, when he remarked

that he should think she and her friends must be kept well supplied. He himself had had socks made for him in generous profusion, and somehow he liked the feeling of wearing Liz's handiwork—why, he could not have told.

- 'Poor girl!' he said, 'you have a lonely life.'
- 'Yes,' said Liz, with unnecessary emphasis. 'It is a lonely life.'
- 'I don't see how it can be mended now,' said Orlando, dropping his eyes uncomfortably on the pages of his book. 'You would not prefer to go back to your grandmother?'
  - 'No!' said Liz fervently.

Orlando went on with his story, and Liz with her knitting. The click-click of her needles made a pleasant enough accompaniment to the bright French romance.

Orlando sat opposite her, just inside the curtain. His book was not as absorbing as usual, and he interrupted his reading occasionally to glance at her nimble fingers and bright pretty face. She looked at him responsively with her large dark eyes. Her glances stirred no feeling in him, for he had long ago learnt that their moving expression was quite involuntary.

Orlando remarked in one of the breaks in the interest of his story: 'You might make a handsome income by your knitting.'

Liz replied quite ingenuously: 'I hope I shall never have to!'

Presently, with a smile still on her face, she moved back into the room, and Orlando, restless and unhappy, went to the fireplace, and stood with his back to Liz, resting his book on the mantelshelf, sometimes trying to fix his attention on it, and sometimes glancing at the reflection of his handsome face in the mirror above. Evil ways were marking their progress in 'lines of true belief.' If his old friends had seen him, they would no longer have called him the Perpetual Youth.

The handwriting of sorrow and care had a fascination for him, and he looked at himself again and again with the sad impersonal interest of the lost.

But there were other reflections in the background of the interesting picture, Liz making her coarse hieroglyphics, grotesquely reproduced in the quaint mirror above her.

Orlando turned sharply round.

Clear before his eyes, in tall capitals, were the two words, 'KEEP AWA——'

Liz was adding the final letter as he caught the sight.

The words were reflected in the old mirror, which, instead of showing them, as an ordinary one would have done, upside down, presented them the right way; so that Orlando, standing at the other side of the room, saw the large letters as plainly as he would have done if he had been looking over Liz's shoulder.

Rage and suspicion suddenly blazed up in his heart; but, clenching his teeth, he watched for what was to follow.

To his surprise, Liz crumpled up the paper, and wound off a few yards of her knitting cotton on it.

She then came to the fire, and knitted a few rounds, apparently in placid concentration.

As Orlando was silent, she moved again, with seeming indifference, into the bow-window.

Orlando followed her every movement with the furious glance of a trapped tiger.

Still Liz knitted on.

In a few seconds, she came to the end of her thread. The crushed paper fell on the floor. Quite naturally, she stooped and picked it up, raised the sash, and threw it out of the window. She remained a few moments where she stood, and then deliberately joined her cotton and came back into the room.

'I am going away now,' said Orlando, closing his book,

and speaking with the composure of desperation. 'I dare say you will not mind parting with me.'

He looked at her with a fixed and expressionless glance.

'You don't seem in a very sociable temper,' she said, with perfect sang-froid. 'But if you have nothing to call you away, I am perfectly willing to hear the news. You had better stay.'

'I must go.'

And he went at once.

He was no sooner in the street than he scanned the road up and down. There were a few children in sight, a blind man with a tray of matches, and a sailor.

Orlando strode rapidly in the direction of the latter. He was a stolid-looking man in a blue jersey, as little likely to be engaged in an amour as possible. But what more likely than the improbable? Liz's note was not on the pavement, where it must have fallen five minutes before. It was scarcely possible that anyone could have picked it up, read it, and vanished from the street in that time. Still, there was a chance.

The spirit which possessed Orlando now was too inveterate to make a false spring. Liz was faithless, that was all of which he could as yet be certain; but he would have confirmations strong as proofs of Holy Writ. It said something for Orlando's shattered nature that his first feeling in this new complication was unmixed wrath. There was no shadow of relief that he could rid himself of a connection which had become a burden. He had come that very afternoon with the half-acknowledged wish that Liz might conceive the spontaneous desire to return to the paths of rectitude. But that wish was forgotten, swept away in a tumult of vindictive passion. He had trusted Liz implicitly, and he had been shamefully deceived; these were his sole convictions, which kept beating upon his brain, and rendering him deaf to the voices of conscience

and reason. He would be revenged; he would speak daggers if he could use none. He would have certitude, and then he would strike. The whole world was false, and the himself had been a fool and a knave to believe in anything, above all things in a smooth-tongued, smiling woman.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

#### ALWAYS ANOTHER.

'Sir, she is yours;
What you've touched you may take. Pretty waltzer—adieu!'
SIR H. ENGLEFIELD.

The general mode of working off such feelings as Orlando's —namely, 'fighting it out'—never suggested itself to his mind. His nature was not combative. If anyone injured him, his impulse was to denounce and have done with him. He had plenty of physical courage, but no fighting instinct. Years before he had joined the Volunteers; but it was rather because he felt the drill would be good physical education than because he felt belligerent, just as William Jenkin had entered the Naval Reserve to get his pay and his uniform, which he considered he earned by his training, and by no means regarded the drill as preparatory exercise.

Orlando's design now was to sweep himself clear of the whole entanglement.

His mind in its present state was incapable of proposing details. He would return when he was least expected, and if his first attempt at a dénouement failed, he would haunt the place, and turn up whenever it would be considered impossible he could be there. He would find Liz with her paramour, and then she should go.

He wandered up and down the dismal purlieus for a couple of hours, trying to think.

At last it occurred to him that if the sailor he had passed was Liz's confederate, his departure had no doubt been marked, and by this time his absence would be considered a safe certainty. No sooner had this inspiration struck him than it grew to be a fact in his mind, and he turned back to the lodgings with the fixed conviction that the game was in his hands.

His frenzy was past feeling fear, or he might have hesitated to place himself, unarmed and defenceless, in the power of a deceitful woman and her brutal lover. The other inhabitants of the house must, of course, have been conniving at his deception, if not actually participating in it. He was not supported by any thought that thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just, for all the moral bearings of the case were obliterated by his passion; but his thoughts were centred in the determination to come face to face with Liz's startled guilt, and then to fling her off.

As soon as he had decided that the hour had come, he was consumed by impatience. He did not know where his heart was, or if he had any; but he felt within him a revolving point of fire, which choked him, took away his breath, and made his brain reel. He knew if he could have felt such suspicion, such horrible certainty, about his wife, nothing but blood could have put out this sapping flame of jealousy. As Liz had never been anything to him but a plaything, never had had any hold upon his actual life, less revenge would do. But there must be a speedy end.

Another course than that he had decided on taking was open to Orlando—to stop the rent of the lodgings, have his furniture removed, and see Liz no more, leaving her to take what steps she pleased. He was aware of this easy alternative, but he gave it no consideration; not that he was weighing degrees of cruelty, but that method of revenge was cold-blooded, and now his blood was liquid fire.

He rather rushed than walked back to the house he had left some two hours before. When he reached it, the road was empty and the house quiet, the blinds down, and behind Liz's window there shone a bright light. Orlando had arrived unexpectedly before now, when, notwithstanding his rule that Liz should execute her commissions in the daytime, she had been absent on an errand. This evening she was certainly at home.

Orlando noiselessly inserted his latchkey, and crept stealthily along the passage and up the stairs. In times gone by fault-finders had accused him of being too indifferent to censure to hide his faults, and now he had come to laboured concealment, entering to his revenge like a thief! He was sensible of a certain humiliation in his action, but a voice within cried 'On!' and he scarcely paused at the faint suggestions of his past.

He stood still a moment at the door, less to listen than to steady his nerves.

A confused murmur of sounds reached him, and he was aware of a heavy odour of hot meat.

'She is feasting the man,' he muttered to himself, as a maddening revolt of feelings rushed over him. If he hesitated a moment longer, he should fly, and leave everything unexplained and unrevenged.

He turned the handle of the door, and stepped into the room.

The table was drawn to the fire, and at it sat the man he had noticed in the afternoon, still dressed in the coarse jersey; but whereas in the street he had looked merely heavy and stolid, he now looked gigantic and thoroughly awake—not a pleasant antagonist in love or war. Orlando himself was tall, wide at the shoulders, stout of limb, but he was not put together in such a solid fashion—in fact, he looked slight and unsteady beside this inert mass.

The man was eating a beefsteak with the concentrated

attention of a wild beast feeding. Liz at the other end of the table was cutting bread-and-butter. Between them was a mug of beer put down in the fender to warm, and the frying-pan with a cinder still hissing in the remnant of gravy. The man's head was bent down over his plate, and Liz had her back towards the door. A moment Orlando looked at the spectacle unseen.

Then the man raised his head and perceived him. He dropped his knife with a clatter, and stared stupidly before him.

Liz turned quickly, and beheld Orlando, livid with rage and repugnance. His eyes were lit with a blaze of anger from the fire within.

Liz did not flinch before his glare, but there came an expression into her soft, dove-like eyes like the look of a hunted animal.

- 'So this is why you were so willing to part with me today,' began Orlando.
- 'I asked you to stay,' said Liz. 'It was you who were in a hurry to go.'
- 'Perhaps you really wished me to make the acquaintance of this friend of yours.'

The man looked from one to the other in mystification.

- 'I didn't care,' said Liz resolutely. 'But he is a friend of mine, and came from the village where I was born.'
  - 'Ay, ay; that's so,' interposed the sailor.

He sat with his fork in his hand, hardly knowing why his appetite was gone from his meal.

- 'An uncle or cousin, no doubt,' suggested Orlando, coming and standing in front of the table. 'It is a pity you did not ask me to stay to meet him; it might have saved misunderstanding. But perhaps you didn't know he was in the neighbourhood?'
- 'No, I didn't,' said Liz, falling into the trap laid for her.

- 'That's a lie, Lizzie,' said the man, looking up uneasily.
- 'I know it is a lie without being told so,' said Orlando.
  'I saw you write "Keep away" on a slip of paper, and throw it out of the window, and I saw him'—pointing to the sailor—'going away as I went out. I don't require you to tell me the state of things.'
- 'Then, why do you come here, creeping in when you are not expected? If you were a man—but you are a coward and a spy! You found me an honest country girl, willing to work for my living, and you tempted me to give up my good name; and what a life you have led me since! You are neither flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring. I hate you!'
- 'I know it,' said Orlando. 'You have always hated me, but you deceived me with your cat-like, soft ways. But it is over. In the eyes of the law you have no shadow of a claim on me. You know that. You came to these rooms willingly, at my invitation; by my order you shall go out. I promised you nothing but what you have had. Go and knit for your living, or go to the workhouse; it is not my affair. You have deceived me, and shall no longer darken my doors.'
  - 'What, will you turn me into the street to-night?'
  - 'Yes.'
  - 'Then you cast me off altogether?'
- 'Yes; go back to the hovel where I found you. Take your things and go. What becomes of you is no concern of mine.'
- 'Put on your bonnet,' said the man, who was gradually rousing from his stupor, 'and come away with me. I am a bad one, but I will not desert you.'
  - 'Not till next time,' said Liz bitterly.
- 'Forgive and forget, can't you?' he said, almost savagely.

- 'You may try it once too often,' she said, turning as if she would leave the room.
- 'You may stay to-night, Liz,' said Orlando, with a mighty revulsion of feeling. 'I have taken away your good name, but you shall not lay more at my door.'
- 'Double-minded!' said Liz, with contempt; but she did not move away.
- 'I am not going to give her up to you again,' said the man. 'You have thrown her off, and ordered her out of the house.'
- 'Go away now, Bob. Mr. Carlyon perhaps did not mean all he said.'
- 'But I did, though!' exclaimed Orlando, once more in a passion.
- 'Then, if you were a man of my own size, I'd throttle you,' said the sailor menacingly.
- 'I don't care,' said Orlando, without stirring a muscle. 'There is nothing in life worth having. Throttle me if you like, and if you can!'

The man's eyes gleamed, and his hands twitched, and he seemed ready for a furious spring. At last he said, looking away: 'But Liz did deceive you; she had better not try that on me.'

- 'Do you mean to go with this friend of yours?' demanded Orlando hardly.
- 'Yes,' said Liz boldly. 'He'll love me in his way; and if he does beat me and kick me when he is drunk, I'd rather have that than be shut up in a living prison like this house, watched and spied upon. He isn't mean, if he is rough; and I love him, and always have!'
  - 'Why did you not tell me that before?'
- 'Much you cared! Why did you not ask me? I had to live some way, and I didn't know that Bob would ever turn up again.'
  - 'Can't you ever forget that?' snarled her lover.

'Never mind. I do forgive.'

She spoke in the sweetest voice to the man she did love, and walked across and laid her hand on his shoulder.

Orlando was torn by conflicting emotions. Remorse forbade him to drive this faithless woman from his shelter, and passion refused to encourage further deception.

'You can go or stay, as you choose, Liz,' he said at last. 'I shall leave you, and let me never see your face again.'

'Amen,' said Liz devoutly.

She little thought how next he would see her face!

Orlando went away into the night. His feelings were no longer conflicting. Bitterness unmixed took possession of him.

'I shall soon be cured of all my vices,' he said to himself savagely. 'I never had a weakness for song. My taste for wine was roughly cured long ago, and woman shall hoodwink me no more. Swept and garnished—swept and garnished!'

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN.

'Man delights not me, no, nor woman neither.'

Hamlet

ORLANDO now fell into a mood of settled gloom. His sullenness was very little short of hatred to all mankind. It was no alleviation of his misery that it was his own folly which had brought him to this pass. Indeed, he did not quite recognise this fact, for wherever he had struck the world, it had sounded hollow, and hollow it would have been to the wisest of men. The higher wisdom, the nobler conception, was an unknown quantity to him. So when the 'outward and visible' failed, he had no comfort, no stay. There was, unknown to him, one merciful influence at work in this condition of sevenfold misery: he had learnt of necessity to read, and through reading to think. 'Kings' company' was his only solace. Books never disappointed, never betrayed.

At that time there were being generally read many books in a style which must have been a revelation to the 'bluewinged sipping butterfly' order of beings. Dr. Shorthouse, Buchanan, and others, had given an intense tone to novelwriting, and the young men of the day 'did' 'John Inglesant' as Sunday reading. The psychological romance was a fashion.

Of course, Orlando read Tita's books. His curiosity compelled him to do so, though in the golden age he had not smiled upon her literary endeavours. He had been like the inartistic wife, who 'would rather have some money than be talked about in song.' He had found that idea a fallacy, it is true. Money, success, the way of the world, was only a snare. There was nothing real and reliable, but death and the aching in your breast.

This seriousness, combined with the acquired taste for high literature, enabled Orlando to appraise Tita's work very differently from what he would have been able to do had he still been sunning himself in the frivolous smiles of Fortune. But his personal knowledge of her damaged his judgment. All unconsciously, he had lived in an atmosphere of belief in her exquisite delicacy and fineness, and now her books seemed to reveal a strong unconventional bias. He did not argue the matter out; he settled it easily by supposing that there was another ideal gone, another point at which the world sounded hollow. His verdict on her writing was: 'Clever, but unprincipled!'

Such was the shock the revelation of her mind produced in him. His idea of principles were the rules and conventions of society, from which, though he had found them vain, he could not break free. He really knew nothing of such principles as Tita's, and the parts of her books which, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' he would as lief have skipped were the lines she called 'written in blood.' The truths that he was shocked at she had wept over. This intellectual prudery was all he had brought away from seeing the world. He did not recognise himself, as others did, in her characters, for to him they appeared, as they were meant to do, as types of weakness, vanity, vacillation, regret.

This ridiculing of all conventional things, which would have been congenial to him now from an unknown pen.

jarred on his fancy, coming from one he had liked not wisely, as it seemed, but very well. It was an added source of unrest. Tita should have remained in the dim realms of simplicity—decorating the church, weeding the garden, nursing the children, helping the poor—and not have thrust herself forward into the crush and throng of clever people, who were well enough as long as one didn't know them, or, rather, were well enough if one happened to know of them first as clever people, and afterwards as friends.

Orlando fully shared the prejudices of his set—school it could scarcely be called, for the word 'school' implies conscious learning—that though good-fellowism, and outspokenness, 'and that sort of thing,' were inoffensive in notable women of the day, and, in fact, necessary to be endured, like the screech of the steam-engine, yet their women must be soft, loving, long-suffering, and conventional!

A woman who could write like Tita must have been very different from what he had taken her to be. The missionary spirit in all her works was in particularly bad taste. Why could she not let the world spin to perdition?

Has anyone ever wondered what were the seven evil spirits which took possession of the man whose soul was swept and garnished? Despair was surely the prince of them. What a divine thought that not seven demons only can be cast out, but seventy times seven! In every living soul there must be some lingering spark which cannot be quenched. 'In those strange periods of mingled recklessness and utter sadness of heart,' says Dr. Wilkinson, 'through which so many in every age have passed, there is a far more tender Eye than any human eye watching over them; a watchful Providence around them, and above them, and with them, at every turn of the daily life:

speaking to them in accents unheard save by the inner conscience, in the silent chamber of the soul.'

In the midst of Orlando's black despondency the only living spark was Remorse. He had pursued steadfastly his own selfish will, and in his course he had pulled down whatever he had put his hands on. His friends were gone, his wife was dead; but there was one who, faithless and deceitful though she might be, had reason to haunt his memory. Was he unpardonably guilty? Was her ruin to be laid at his door? Would the thought of it never cease to torment him? Would it at last sink him in the slough of despond? Were the fumes of hell already suffocating him? He hated the thought of her, but it would recur, again and again. It was useless to say, 'It is over.' The incubus remained; and there was no reparation to be made, and if there had been, he knew he would not have made it. Remorse is not repentance.

Liz had vanished out of his life, and he had made no effort to trace her. She had gone, no doubt, to the rough lover, who had apparently toyed with the affections of her youth. He had not to sue for pardon to be forgiven. It was the old case of 'Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad.' But yet Orlando felt he had been guilty of forcing her into worse depths of misery than need have been. Her startled cry, 'What! will you turn me into the street?' haunted him. In the darkness and despair he heard it with a responsive shudder. This compunction was no return of Liz's influence. He would as soon have thought of wishing his wife out of her grave as of cherishing regret at his later release.

He did not know it, but the haunting memory was conscience; it was the one remnant of his better nature.

His condition, utterly miserable and forlorn, was like that of the Heir of Linne, in the old ballad, who, having squandered his fortune, bethinks him of the little lonesome lodge, which his father had made him vow never to sell, and where he was to find, when all else was spent, a faithful friend.

'But bare and lothely were the walls— Here's sorry cheer, quo' the Heir of Linne.

'The little window, dim and dark,
Was hung with ivy, brier and yew;
No shimmering sun here ever shone,
No halesome breeze here ever blew.

'No chair, no table, mot he spy;
No cheerful hearth, no welcome bed;
He saw but a rope with a running noose,
Which dangling hung above his head.'

Orlando had come to a lonesome lodge indeed, and the faithful friend was a running noose, which dangling hung above his head.

'The Heir of Linne spake never a word, Never a word he spake but three; This is a trusty friend indeed, And is right welcome unto me.'

So saying, he put the rope around his neck and sprang into the air; but instead of the death he expected, the ceiling gave way, and he found at the end of the rope a key, which admitted him to two chests full of gold and a chest full of silver. This was a faithful friend indeed!

With Orlando this inalienable lonesome lodge was Conscience, and the faithful friend was Remorse. He saw no way in which he could benefit himself or others by this lingering solicitude about Liz, but it was a hungry fiend which would not 'down.' Amidst the wreck of his life this baying hound would be heard. It was no use to stop his ears to the sound. The voice came from within.

He must learn what had become of her.

There was but one course by which to pursue his inquiries. He must go back to the dismal den where he

had first found her, and learn what he could from the old Irishwoman.

Accordingly, impatient of himself for his compunction, yet impelled by an irresistible force, he once more sought the squalor of the East End.

Many months had gone by since he had last been there, but the same old woman was still the holder of the wretched tenement, which looked one degree more rotten and squalid than ever. The dust of months whirled up in the draught of the doorway. The broken banisters were festooned with cobwebs. It was daylight now, and the place could be seen in all its horrors.

The old woman held the door half open, while she scanned her visitor narrowly.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' she said, when memory had pieced together the past. 'You are come back again, are you?'

She motioned him down into the shop, if such it could be called, where the oranges and nuts were stored which the old man sold in the streets.

'Do you know what has become of Liz?' Orlando asked.

He knew that it was useless to beat about the bush.

'No,' she said, 'I don't.'

A little sigh of relief burst from Orlando's heart. 'See,' said Self-love, 'how useless is investigation.' 'And be ashamed of your penitence,' said Pride. 'You were careful not to repent till reparation was out of the question.' 'But there may be some clue to be recovered, for all that,' said Compunction.

- 'Have you ever seen her since she went away from here with me?' he asked.
- 'What will you give me to tell?' demanded the old creature.
  - 'I won't give you anything at all,' said Orlando angrily.
  - 'Well, you needn't be losing your temper over a trifle

like that, honey. I have seen the poor lass. She came back saying you had turned her into the street.'

This statement was made very cautiously, while she scanned the young man's face, as if she wished to gather the drift of his present solicitude.

- 'Did she tell you why?' Orlando demanded.
- 'Oh,' said the old woman suavely, 'I could make that out for myself.'
  - 'Then, someone came with her—a sailor?'
  - 'Yes.'
  - 'Did you take them in?'

A moment's hesitation.

- 'Yes.'
- 'Did they get married? He was her old sweetheart, it seemed.'
  - 'Married?' said the old woman dubiously.
  - 'Yes. I suppose you know what "married" means.'
- 'Yes; I know very well. When I was a girl they all got married. I married Don'l.'
- 'I am glad to hear it,' said Orlando impatiently; 'but if you understand, why don't you answer me?'
- 'People do different things in different places. I don't think they get married here.'
- 'That is true,' thought Orlando. 'Yet the woman is faithful to a tacit agreement, and the man does not desert her any sooner than he would his wife, had it not been for the interference of the law. They regard their children seriously, and fulfil mutual obligations. It is not the worst imaginable state of things. Why did they go away?' he asked.
- 'He went to sea, and she went away hop-picking. Poor folks have to work for their living.'
  - 'What do you think will become of her?'
  - 'I think she will come to the workhouse.'
  - 'Then, hadn't she any money?'

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- 'Her man might have given her some, but he was a drinking, bad lot.'
- 'What is he going to do when he comes back again? Do you know?'
- 'I have answered a lot of questions,' said the old woman gruffly, 'and I don't see what business that is of yours.'
  - 'I want Liz to be happy and to lead an honest life.'
- 'Well, it is rather late in the day to think about that. I should say the honestest thing she could do was to stick to her man.'
  - 'I think so, too.'
- 'Oh, then I may tell you that he is coming back here when he comes home, and she will join him.'
  - 'Then, everything is settled?'
  - 'Yes.'

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Orlando went away, feeling that as far as he was concerned the drama was over. He could do nothing for Liz; she had taken her own course, and must abide by it.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### NEITHER LOVE NOR ART?

'I believe that a desire to get married is the natural state of a woman of—say from twenty-five to thirty-five. . . . The truth in the matter is clear. A woman's life is not perfect or whole till she has added herself to a husband.'—ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

TITA left London the day after Mr. Sabota's proposal, in thorough disgust with her fortunes. She did not wish to make further mischief between him and the Fotheringays, and yet felt incapable of meeting him as before.

She counted on complete sympathy at home. In this expectation, however, she was a little disappointed.

Her sudden arrival had to be explained beyond the brief statement of her telegram, so she recounted her troubles. But the recital did not evoke Bianca's rapturous sympathy as she expected. However, when one came to think of it, Bianca never was rapturous.

- 'I should think the very best thing you could have done would have been to accept Mr. Sabota,' she said, without any apparent shame at her own inconsistency.
- 'But you always were against marriage!' Tita exclaimed in astonishment.
- 'Oh no, not at all! I have always approved of it, but it was the silly nonsense that I never believed in,' said Bianca. 'I should certainly have advised your accepting

a well-to-do, middle-aged man, whose antecedents were all in his favour. At that age you might at least hope to keep his affections.'

- 'Mother!' exclaimed Tita. 'Did you ever hear such heresy? I did expect that you would have understood me at home.'
- 'I quite approve of your action, my dear,' said Mrs. Storck encouragingly. 'No doubt Bianca has the reason of the world on her side, but I should never wish an elderly husband, even if he were steady and rich, for either of my daughters. So far, love has been the guiding principle, and I hope it will always be so. Marriage is a great enterprise, at the best. I should prefer you and Bianca to remain as you are.'
- 'I have no doubt of it,' said Bianca, with something like her old asperity. 'But I don't see why one mightn't love a man who happened to be steady, rich, and middle-aged.'
- 'At any rate,' said Tita, 'it would be safer to take a lover in the certainty of being his first choice than in the hope of being his last, for that is what no one can depend on.'
- 'Then, I suppose we shall have you going off with some boy, whose moustache is just sprouting, like the mildew on an apple-pie? You know we aren't growing any younger ourselves!'

Bianca said this in unusual earnestness, though her little turned-up nose and bright, unwrinkled face showed that she belonged to a family that wore well.

- 'It is true enough that we are growing older,' said Tita.
  'I feel so old sometimes.'
- 'How are you old?' asked Bianca quickly. 'Your teeth are your own, and your hair isn't getting thin or gray. I don't see that you grow old at all. And I don't feel old myself. It is the fact that alarms me. If it weren't for the

register and mother's memory, I shouldn't be afraid to pass myself off for two-and-twenty.'

'I do wish Mr. Sabota had known you!' said Tita, admiringly surveying the pretty, animated face of her sister.

Bianca blushed intensely; there was no such stuff in her thoughts.

'Too great an honour for me,' she said gaily. 'But you have not asked how things are going on here.'

'I saw in the newspapers that there had been a great catch of herrings, and I hope the Jenkins had their share in the luck. I don't suppose much else has happened.'

'I don't know that much has happened,' said Bianca reflectively. 'The children at Pengeagle have taken the measles. They are to have a governess, on trial, after Christmas—or so they say. At present the boys are doing some French and Latin with the Board School master, learning their lessons at home with Mirry. She came to me in a great state of mind the other day because Squire had asked her what was the gender of shooting a duck! She said it stood to reason that it must be masculine, but she could not think of the rule; and, she added, in lessons it was much more important to know the rule than the reason. Arthur is getting more bald than ever, and he cannot bear for anyone to notice it. None of this is very new, you will say, except the measles. But the mine is likely to be started again—wouldn't that be a delightful sensation? And there is some talk of reseating the church, which, of course, would oblige everyone to set to work to get the money. And then through the winter there is to be a temperance revival. That will be quite in your line.'

Tita was surprised and disappointed to find that the 'sensations' did not much interest her, and that life at home promised to be weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.

She felt acutely the wickedness and futility of such discontent, and never gave it the rein. Still, urge what she would, it tinged her thoughts and actions.

She took up the temperance work with energy; she voluntarily undertook the charge of the Pennant children's education—the three elder ones being already at school—and kept herself thoroughly occupied; but there were intervals of leisure, and long sleepless nights, during which an invisible hand kept knocking at her breast, and a voice repeated, 'Arise, my love, and come away.' She did not wish herself free from this tormenting, fluttering memory, for love is in itself a pleasure, like existence. But the to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow looked unendurable. For years she had endured the blank monotony; but, then, to-morrow is not yesterday!

In reality, she bore up well; her murmurs were 'from the teeth inwards.' She sought no confidant, though there is supposed to be nothing that a woman finds it harder to keep to herself than her love affairs. No one would have guessed that the busy woman who went about her daily work with a smiling face carried an incurable ache in her heart. Love does not now steal the roses from the damask cheek, neither does its victim move through the world in a green and yellow melancholy.

With herself, however, she had a clear understanding; there was no longer any equivocation. The restlessness, the unceasing craving in her heart, was merely that she wanted Orlando, her old love, the spirit of her youth. She would not have given her right hand, or even her little finger, for him—for he would have been shocked at her being without them—nor would she have given a year of her life, for she considered that was not hers to give; but she would have given her power and fame and fortune for one look of the golden time. Yet when she said her fervent prayers there never crept in a petition that he might come

back to her. It was always that he might come back to himself! And on many a weary night she rose from her bed, and fell on her knees, saying: 'Perhaps I do not pray earnestly enough. Even now he may be in danger or harm, and at midnight the bridegroom cometh. Keep him from evil, and turn his heart.'

The one outlet which this intense mood took was a conventional one. Tita put some of her unrest into poetry. She had long been in the habit of sleeping with paper and pencil under her pillow, and practice had enabled her to mark down her thoughts as she lay agitated in the darkness. In this way she caught her ideas white-hot, and in the solitary hours of the night occasional flashes of music—'a vision of song'—rose before her troubled mind.

She sent her verses to one of the magazines, and the few intimate friends she had immediately jumped to the conclusion that 'there was something behind.' There is very romantic poetry which produces no conviction of sincerity on the mind, and there is some which rings out like a personal confession. The Brownings are an example of the latter style, and so, in a less degree, are Burns and Byron. Tita's style had the same appearance of being self-revelation, and her friends soon settled the identity of 'the young man fair and strong' she was resigning herself 'to meet no more.' In this they were wrong, for it was no particular case she was regretting, but the absence of happiness from her life.

'Something it is which thou hast lost, Some pleasure from thine early years.'

Perhaps, indeed, it was rather her own inability to submit to her privations than the monotony and emptiness which she regretted. There was something intolerable to her pride in the knowledge that she lived with a sense of need wide awake in her heart. Yet what was the cure? No one could work hard enough to stifle regret, and, after all, she did not want to strangle her Hydra. But it was so terrible to be hungry and to have no food.

Tita had displayed fortitude enough in her encounters with her suitors to entitle her to strong commendation, but she was quite conscious of weakness, and was thankful that her temptations were in the background.

And yet—should she ever be at rest as she was? Was it any good to cling to a severe ideal? Should she not be happier if she accepted a more commonplace fate?

I once knew a clever man who propounded the startling theory that the best way to treat some temptations was to give way to them. This seemed a dangerous doctrine; but then he only hankered after a blue plate! not a common, everyday ornament, but a 'most precious' one. He knew the tone of blue he wanted, and the sort of pattern; but he could never find the perfect plaque, and he thought if he were to buy the one that came nearest to his ideal, and stuck it up and tried to worship it, if it did not satisfy him, he should, at any rate, be cured of his fancy, just as inoculation cures by an artificial small-pox. Such a lax idea about only a blue plate does not seem to matter, but it is the thin end of the wedge. The temptation to cure craving by inoculation is always strong, and should be resisted at the outset.

Tita had exactly the same feeling about her love that my clever friend had about his weakness for a blue plate. She was beginning to recognise that she should never find 'the sublimest thing that is,' and it did seem that it would be a relief to give way to temptation.

Nourishing her ideal as she did, the loneliness of her country life appalled her. It was unendurable. Though she could keep herself from the hollow cheek and faded eye condition, she could not concentrate her energies on the common round. She had been bitten by the gadfly, and

was doomed to unceasing restlessness. And worse than everything, the balm of Gilead failed her.

For months she had been unable to settle down to her writing. Her plots were distinct in her memory, with their situations and scenes, but she could not recall the actuality of them. It was like beholding a landscape, solid, severe, unchangeable, but obscured by an impalpable mist, which left revealed only a crag or chasm here or there through a rift in the cloud.

# CHAPTER XXX.

### HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN!

'How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds
Makes ill deeds done!'

King John.

# 'But, Fred, it is affectation.

"There sits the Fragment, and above
The wind comes rushing like a flood.
It heeds him not! He sits afar;
And, like the murmuring of a thousand pines,
A voice demands: Shall this thing be?"

A solitary shore, on which shines down the moveless, silvern moon——'

Thus Tita amused herself at the expense of one of her own favourites.

Her restless mood had driven her from the quiet home, which had once seemed a haven of refuge. The Mighty Babylon had waved its banners, and she had crept unresisting into its shadow, like a victim to the upas-tree. The voice of Use and Custom, instead of soothing, maddened, and she had fled from the mighty sea and the lonely moorland—that nature which she had once called the art of God. Did not every headland, blue in the distance, every tangled bank of bracken, every waving stretch of spiregrass, say, 'Once upon a time'? Even the

## HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN!

sight of those dearly-loved, sympathetic faces, with, to her sick soul, the suggestion of a pointed solicitude in them, sent sharp arrows of pain along her nerves.

So she had left Scylla to drift upon Charybdis. In London, at least, she was sure of distraction.

Olivia, alarmed at her Muse's long silence—for she did not highly regard such efforts as 'We shall meet no more' and 'Next year'—was glad to have her once more under her influence.

She could not understand what she called 'Tita's serious flippancy,' but she welcomed any artistic movement in her sister's mind, even such hysterical satire as she indulged in to-night. Why Tita should ridicule what she most revered, why she should parody her favourite authors, was a constant source of perplexity. But there was method in the madness, and Olivia hoped much from Tita's shrewdness and clearness of vision.

To-night, as Tita flung around her sarcasms, Olivia smiled, and remembered the old days when in bitter incredulity she used to mimic the failings of the more successful writers. At last she had distanced many of them, and yet the old bitterness remained. How some little gleam of hope would have mellowed the mood of the young enthusiast! Had success come too late? Or was Tita some creature which required other sustenance than the assurance of power and the world's applause, which had seemed so all-sufficient in their dreamy youth?

While Olivia asked herself these pertinent questions, and while Tita delighted her brother-in-law with a play on the weaknesses of her fellow-novelists, a visitor arrived.

At sight of him Tita's face flushed, and she started like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons, or like the sorcerer who, toying with his magic, has called up a dangerous visitant.

The day before she had sent him the magazine containing

her last verses—a shameless overture, she had felt at the time.

Hugh Templar was far less embarrassed than she was at the meeting, though he was posing in the rôle of rejected admirer, and had not been to the house since she had dismissed him with tears two years before. He had resigned his ambition to win her, but by no means the feeling which prompted it, and he had behaved with charming devotion when they had met casually or at the houses of mutual friends. He perfectly knew the ground he stood on. She, on the other hand, knew nothing but that, while she dreaded, she had courted this encounter. Her heart beat rapidly, and she felt an almost irresistible impulse to explain and apologize for her presence in London, though she knew how suicidal such a course would be.

'The Professor told me that he saw you at the meeting of the Geographical Society last night,' the young man stated with perfect frankness and composure. 'I was not likely to meet you at any of those places, so I thought I would make sure of you here.'

Tita gave a great sigh of relief. Perhaps he had not then received her olive-branch, but in coming had been moved by a spontaneous impulse of his own—sweet coincidence!

'It is very kind of you,' she said, with such composure as she could command. To make a point of his visit would be horribly bad taste.

Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringay fell into the attitude of spectators or auditors, which comes so naturally to people who know themselves to be a little out of sympathy with the scene they are witnessing.

'I read your poem,' continued Mr. Templar, with the same frankness, 'and I thought it would be a pity if we did not meet again; one hasn't too many friends in this wide world.'

There was a modest renunciation in the very tone of his voice.

'We all thought your verses very pathetic,' he went on, in the same easy way, 'and most of us, I expect, saw a long row of "the old familiar faces." People were very much puzzled about the son of the soil, whose face you say was "more than all, divine." One feels sure he is real. Is it not so?

Tita's embarrassment was quite dispelled. Had Hugh Templar been a second Socrates, he could not have pursued a wiser course of conciliation.

'Yes, he was real,' said Tita, forgetting everything but the subject of the verse in question. 'Only a farm labourer, and I met him one hot day on the highroad between the villages of Ipplepen and Staverton, down in Devonshire. He was going to the Kingskerswell Station with a basket of fruit, and I met him on the railway bridge, and asked him the way. He had the most perfect face I ever saw, but it was not that which struck me: it was that it was more than all—divine. It was quite young, but radiated an utter patience. I never knew who he was, and never tried to find out; but as long as I live the remembrance of his face and figure—for his figure was as perfect as his face, and expressed the same power of endurance—will be the grandest picture I can ever see.'

'It must be rather a sad thing to see so much in everything,' Templar said, reflecting with mitigated relief that it was a sorrow not likely to be in store for himself. 'Is it not what they call a morbid habit of mind?'

'Templar is coming on,' said Mr. Fotheringay, in an aside to Olivia.

They neither of them smiled on the suit of this penniless Adonis, and yet they knew well enough that he had more attractions for Tita than the good and wise Sabota.

'They may call it what they please,' said Tita, brighten-

ing, 'but I don't think their superior wisdom has yet discovered a cure.'

'Don't you think, though,' said Mr. Templar, colouring slightly at his own audacity, 'that you might be happier if you kept in the swimming, you know, instead of standing apart brooding over things? Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Fotheringay?'

Olivia, unsuspicious of any guile, gave a decided assent.

'Suppose, now, instead of studying hard and going to hear addresses about nobody knows where, you went to the theatre or some place like that, more in the ordinary way. Don't you think it would be quite as wise—and much nicer?'

Just as he asked this low-level question, he straightened out his shoulders and raised his head, as if he were not ashamed of it.

It was impossible but that Hugh Templar should remind Tita of Orlando—the Orlando, of course, of her teens. His quiet laugh, the tone of his voice, the habit of turning his head a little, and his eyes a little more, when he spoke, all recalled that other fair and strong young man. Was it only that they all had the same manner, perhaps cultivated the same tricks? Or was it that she was only waiting for and wanting the freshness and pleasantness which nature associates with youth and manhood? Dreadful thought!

All these ideas whirled through Tita's mind while Hugh Templar turned his head and looked over his shoulder. Like a flash of lightning came the ludicrous remembrance of Bianca's jeering remark: 'I suppose we shall have you going off with some youth whose moustache is just sprouting, like the mildew on an apple-pie.' Templar's moustache was barely beyond the mildew stage; but the recollection, instead of irritating Tita into hostility with her own weakness, somehow fluttered her imagination. Her heart beat more rapidly again. Her ideas became blurred and indis-

tinct. She was conscious of a peculiar disorganization somewhere—in mind or morals; which, she could not tell.

Having surveyed her over his shoulder, Hugh Templar added composedly: 'I suppose you have done all the sight-seeing of London long ago?'

- 'In that respect I am not the conventional country cousin on whom you all look down,' said Tita. 'I have done very little. I never cared for it.'
- 'Nor I,' said Templar easily. 'I think rushing about just to be able to say that you know every place of interest here or there is simply ridiculous. However, I wish somebody would invent a proverb meaning something between "Extremes meet" and "There is a difference between staring and stark mad."'
- 'You would wish to recommend keeping your eyes open as the happy mean between ignorant blindness and ridiculous curiosity?' suggested Tita.
- 'How wonderful that you should understand what one means when one hardly knows one's self!' said the young fellow, with genuine admiration. 'I suppose, now, you know what a man is thinking about without his telling you—you don't want a window in his breast, like the old pagan in the fable?'
- 'Indeed, you are mistaken,' said Tita, though she swallowed the compliment. 'I have often been surprised, and even wounded, to find how little I can understand people. I seem to know how they will act, and what they will say, and how they will feel and think, and yet I cannot feel with them, or make them feel with me.'
- 'That is your morbid habit of mind appearing again,' protested Templar. 'Perhaps if you thought less you would understand more.'
- 'A second Daniel!' exclaimed Mr. Fotheringay, who could no longer endure to witness 'young Help-yourself' scoring so bravely.

Templar dropped his eyebrows in annoyance.

'Don't you think yourself, then,' he said, turning on the interrupter, 'that so much introspection is decidedly bad?'

Mr. Fotheringay could not deny that such was his serious conviction.

'Then, I suggest,' said the young man, without any further hesitation, 'that Miss Storck hands herself over to me for a little instructive sight-seeing. You wouldn't be afraid to trust yourself to me?' he said, turning half back to Tita. 'I have taken care of you before now. Do you remember?'

The superstitious have some excuse for believing that there is magic in certain words. Who hears the words 'for ever,' 'alone,' 'far away,' 'do you remember?' without a thrill? Tita felt a curious sensation, just as if a thousand feelers of her heart pushed out and expanded like the delicate fringe of a sea-anemone in the returning tide.

Templar was conscious also of a surging pulsation, quite new to him, caused either by animal magnetism or some other subtle force. It was a delicious experience to both, partaking at once of the nature of exhilaration and intoxication. Was it that their spirits were rushing together?

'If you would come, I think we might find something worth seeing, and, at any rate, a holiday would be good for you.'

It was curious to himself that, while his blood seemed to be hissing in his brain, there was a perfectly cool undercurrent of calculation. He could think more sharply than usual, though the process seemed to go on somewhere beyond the realm of his volition.

'Tita is scarcely overworking her brain at present, I should imagine,' put in Olivia indiscreetly.

'Certainly not,' admitted Tita. 'I am quite out of working order. It is no use trying to write.'

Olivia's interference annoyed her, and she certainly spoke with the tone of concession to the besieger.

- 'Then, distraction is the best thing for you,' said Templar. 'All that remains is for us to decide when and where we shall go. To-morrow afternoon——'
- 'But you have your work to do, which cannot be shirked like mine.'
- 'I can get a holiday from the office for a desperate case like this,' he said, with a smile. 'To-morrow I can fetch you at two. The only question left is—where shall we go?'
- 'If you are seeking distraction, you might look in at Bedlam,' suggested Mr. Fotheringay sarcastically.

The witticism was ill-timed, and irritated Tita's temper, already sensitive to the least opposition. A sharp retort rose to her lips, but she repressed it with an effort. Compunction, which she had hardly ever confronted before in her life, held up a warning finger.

'I am going,' was all she said.

Her three auditors stared at her, and she burst into a somewhat inconclusive little laugh.

- 'Oh, I don't mean to Bedlam!' she said; 'but somewhere else.'
- 'Then, it is settled,' said Templar. 'You can think of where it shall be to-night. I don't care—'

He broke off abruptly, as if in the middle of his thought.

Tita perfectly understood.

Both Olivia and Mr. Fotheringay were silent. They disapproved of the whole affair, but knew that opposition was useless.

In the seclusion of their own room, they discussed Tita's latest aberration with severity.

Olivia had no sympathy with such weakness.

- 'I never should have thought it of Tita,' she said. 'It is not at all the way we were brought up. Now, some girls I have known who seemed to lose their heads where there was any question of admiration or marriage; but we never indulged in that veiled defiance which is so revolting in those who are otherwise hardly fast. When Mirry went—.'
  - 'Accompanied by the huzzahs of the family----'
- 'Now, Fred, don't be so heartless. You know, there never was a more simple-minded family. If I did not know how much vexed you were about this foolish arrangement, I should think you were determined to tease me out of all patience.'
- 'I don't see what we can do. That is what puts me out.'
- 'Of course, we can't do anything but suffer. At Tita's age, and with her temper, our interference would do more harm than good. But it makes me blush to think of it. I suppose he is ten years younger than she is, and he hasn't a penny! Of course, he is handsome, and he has the merit, or rather attraction, of not seeming to care for the fact; and, then, he has that hateful readiness which all the young men seem to cultivate now—if they have an idea, they are ready to talk of it; if they have a penny, they are ready to spend it.'
- 'You decided just now that he hadn't a penny, so he will be spared the latter temptation.'
- 'But, don't you see, he will spend hers! Just fancy the spectacle—Tita married to a boy like that, only just one stage removed from a "masher"! Her mind will deteriorate, and she will have to work on to provide him with money for his follies; so we shall have her writing at last for daily bread, who was once almost too proud to write for fame!'

- 'Do you think we need resign ourselves to such a dire catastrophe? And, to be fair, Templar, as far as we know, has paid for his follies, whatever they may be. And is it not rather an extreme conclusion to suppose that Tita will marry him, because she has agreed to spend to-morrow afternoon with him?'
- 'I cannot see that it is at all extreme. Considering their position towards one another, it seems to me inevitable. She always did admire that kind of man, but one would have thought that her experience would have taught her wisdom.'

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## CURING BY INOCULATION.

'It's not the gallant who comes to woo, But the gallant's way of wooing.'

Bab Ballads.

Tita also suffered very bitter misgivings. To her, fine of the fine, a flirtation had always seemed vulgar and coarse. And now she felt impelled to the same falseness she had always condemned. Why had she promised to go? Why did she feel determined that she would go, come what would of it? She had had strength of mind enough to decline all sensible substitutes for love, which she might honourably have accepted, and yet she stooped to this meretricious sentiment, which was very little, if anything, short of disgraceful. In this fluctuating misery she never thought of abandoning her purpose. She felt carried forward by an instinct as irresistible as that which would have raised her arm to ward off a blow, or closed her eyelids at a flash of light.

During the next morning she was silent and nervous, and kept repeating to herself, 'It is such a little thing.'

When at two the bell rang, it seemed to her that the sound tingled through her nerves, as the blood does through the veins after a sharp blow.

The tension and uneasiness which she had suffered had not prevented her from dressing with unusual care, not too fashionably, but in such a manner as should appeal rather than strike. Her small bonnet and dark brown dress gave her rather a matronly air, and a stranger seeing the two young people as they walked down the steps and across the square would certainly have taken them for a newly-married pair. The consciousness of this was very agreeable to Templar, and flattered his fancy, just as his 'Do you remember?' had done hers the night before.

'Have you made up your mind as to what we shall do?' he asked. 'It is rather brazen of us, you know, to start on our adventure without even the pretence of an object.'

Tita quivered at his words, and thought he was not beginning the adventure happily.

'Whatever you wish will be right to me,' he continued. 'Do with me what you like.'

He was quite in earnest in his protestation. His devotion was such that he genuinely wished her to command him. He knew only too well that she had not been in the slightest degree in love with him two years ago, and there was nothing in the interval to justify a change of feeling; but she might have changed her mind. If so, so much the luckier for him. If not—well, still he felt vaguely he could understand her; only then, after his nerves had settled down again, he thought he should probably be somewhat less in love with her. But while the thing hung in the balance she was supreme.

Tita felt that she was standing with one foot on thin ice, and that to advance was safer than to hesitate.

- 'I do not think I mind what we do, either,' she said.
- 'Oh, if we could only wander about your cliffs, and watch the sea and feel that we had a world of our own!'

For a moment Tita faltered. His words set the chords of memory jarring. But she looked at him. He was radiant, and in infectiously good spirits. She could not help smiling back at him.

'However,' he added, 'as we are now taking our diversions in London town we must decide on something. We cannot stand at the end of the road and discuss all the sights.'

'To the Tower, then,' said Tita promptly.

She would as soon have said, 'To Madame Tussaud's' or 'To the Greenwich Hospital'; only 'To the Tower' flowed out more naturally. She had gone through a dozen resorts in her mind, without being able to feel the slightest bias. To Olivia she had felt bound to say, 'We can look up the birds at the Natural History Museum,' but she had come out without the faintest plan. Templar's 'Don't expect her back to dinner' had shed darkness rather than light on their project.

- 'Do you mean it?' he said now.
- 'Yes, if you really have no preference.'

He laughed gaily.

'I never was there in my life,' he said. 'It will be education in earnest.'

He hailed a cab, and carefully helped her into it. He took his place beside her in the brightest spirits.

'To the Tower,' he told the man; and somehow the prospect of exploring that ancient treasure-house became exhilarating.

A hansom is the most provocative vehicle known to civilization, far more so than the famed gondola of Venice. As they were swept cheerfully along he began to formulate a programme.

'We will see all that there is to be seen at the Tower,' he promised rashly: 'the armour, and the beef-eaters, and the Crown jewels, and the condemned cell, and the block; and when we have had enough of that kind of thing we will go somewhere and have tea—ladies cannot get through without their tea, I know. Then we will go and see the people crossing London Bridge; that is quite one of the

sights. Then we will dine, and then we will go to the theatre—'

Tita listened to him breathlessly.

'We cannot possibly do that,' she said.

'I knew you would say that,' he answered, quite unabashed. 'Tickets and dress and propriety and what not. We cannot have our day spoiled by such considerations; we must manage somehow. But we need not look further ahead than the present hour. The Tower to begin with.'

They wandered about, sometimes snatching little scraps of information together from the guide-book, sometimes parting in the mazes of armour and figures to meet again in a few seconds for little babbling confidences or jesting comments on what struck their observation. Tita half felt, half feigned, a horror of her surroundings, and begged him not to really lose her. The Tower, the Bridge of Sighs, and the Coliseum, must call up a chill of terror to a sensitive mind, a revolt of weakness against might. associations would have been unbearable to Tita alone, but, wrought-up as she was, they only added a clinging tenderness to her manner. The old, old warder, who had charge of the Beauchamp Tower, took a fatherly interest in the young visitors, who combined historic research with a very 'obvious human bliss.' He held one of Tita's hands, while Templar held the other, that she might say she had been in the tiny, thick-walled cell, hallowed by so many memories of pain and fortitude, and yet not suffer for an instant the chilling disassociation with human life, which must have been the bitterest pang of captivity. They traced the memorable names cut here and there on the stones, and scrambled up and down innumerable stairs. Then, when she might begin to weary, his arm was ready to support her, and her light strain on him thrilled him with an exquisite suggestion of possession. He took her small cool hand, and told her it felt like a little dead bird.

fingers fluttered at that, and then they felt like the tendrils of a vine.

His delight was complete when they were seated together in a quiet restaurant, and she poured his tea, and gave him cream from the little brown jugs, her own as well as his.

- 'The afternoon has been one long smile,' she said softly.
- 'No, no,' he replied; 'think of the thumbscrews.'

And when her lip dropped at his thoughtless words, and she said it was wicked to be happy when one remembered those things, he comforted her with the plausible suggestion that we were not meant to remember them.

Later on they joined the crowds in the streets, and found the dualitude in multitude intoxicating, too. They watched the wavering lights reflected in the river; they watched the swift cabs flow away into the distances; they watched the light clouds drift across the rising moon and melt into the reseda sky. Everything was full of interest and significance and the charm of novelty.

She would not consent to the theatre scheme, and he was feeling too anxious to secure her comfort to press it. And perhaps he preferred not to share her attention with any concentrated amusement.

'How lucky! There are the fireworks!' he exclaimed.
'You cannot object to them, and if we dine at once we shall get down in time to see as much as you will care for. We cannot be back until late, but so much the better.'

They dined with light-hearted gaiety, though neither of them could do more than make a pretence of tasting the delicacies which the obsequious waiters pressed upon them. The many mirrors, the gently swaying palms, and the distant music, and their own excitement, gave them a sense of the theatrical—a sense without a consciousness.

They were just in time for their train. Templar was a very responsible person in such matters, and, however excited, could think of every little detail.

Tita had never been to the Crystal Palace before, and was as eager as a child over the illuminations. The whole world seemed in league to smooth things for them, as it always does when we are happy enough. The crowding paused as they came by, and they did not stop to think that they supplied the spectators with the little drama of which the good-natured universe never tires. The wind blew softly from the west, making the playful attempts at wrapping up with a silk handkerchief an agreeable farce. The evening flew by, and the time for return came too soon for both; but Templar knew how to make the most of the fragments.

When they came to take their places in the train, he smiled on the guard, put his hat on the rack, and they found themselves with another half-hour's tête-à-tête.

As the train whirled them home, he indulged in a very natural jubilation on the success of the day.

'And I wonder what it has cost you!' broke in Tita suddenly.

He was well aware that it had cost him a considerable sum in coin of the realm, if that was the only price he had to pay for it; but he parried the disintegrating thrust.

'It is only once in a lifetime,' he protested, his eyes supplying the commentary to the rather inadequate text.

Two tears smarted under Tita's lids. Only once in a lifetime! Was she playing comedy or tragedy? She managed to smile in answer to his eager look, but she could not have spoken a word in response. However, she was one who could maintain a very gracious silence, and the end was drawing very near. What was it to be?

Templar explained that he should take her home from Victoria by train instead of by cab.

'And save a shilling,' he added, laughing with conscious insincerity.

'And waste half an hour in getting round,' she suggested.

'No; save it, you mean,' he amended, and pressed the tips of her gloved fingers in his palm.

She had no opposition to offer, so they reached her station in that roundabout way.

They were now only a stone's-throw from the house.

The square was empty as they came lingeringly along the pavement. The moonlight shone fitfully, intercepted occasionally by the light clouds which scudded across the sky. It was very late, and they both knew it; but their feet seemed weighted.

At last they reached the door, and looked at one another.

Her eyes were larger and more luminous than usual, dilated and illumined by a nameless emotion. The half-timorous, half-tender expression of her face was irresistible. . . .

He stooped over her. She raised her lips quite responsively. . . .

At that instant a shadow, as of a tall man approaching rapidly, fell on the pavement beside them. They drew apart, and looked up suddenly.

There was no one, and when they turned back their glance again, no shadow! Their eyes met questioningly. In his there was somewhat of embarrassment, in hers mere horror.

She said nothing, but gave him her hand, with her head averted.

He rang the bell, and waited in silence till the door opened, and she vanished within.

As he turned away, the phantom shade again slid up the pavement. It was the shadow of the poplar-tree in the garden opposite, swayed by the wind!

Sleep was impossible to Tita that night, and the ex-

perience of the day kept beating on her brain and driving her nearly to frenzy. 'Only once in a lifetime.' That was the central truth which confronted her at every turn in her tortuous arguments.

Morning found her resigned and flaccid. Perhaps it was fortunate that the reaction from the strain left her prostrated by a headache, which was sufficiently evident to appeal to Olivia's pity. The forenoon was spent in a darkened room, and nothing was said of the expedition of the day before. But towards evening Tita came into the drawing-room, and said that if Mr. Templar came he was to be admitted. Olivia understood Tita well enough to appreciate the situation. The episode was to all intents and purposes ended.

'Do you wish me to stay or go?' she asked quite gently.

'To stay, please,' Tita almost begged.

The dark rims under her eyes and the trembling of her hands, added to an attitude of dejection, spoke eloquently of the emotional shipwreck she had suffered.

Templar arrived as early as he could possibly get there—'Equal to either fate,' he repeated to himself as he came in.

One look was enough to tell him which fate it was to be.

A few awkward sentences, mercifully slurred over by Olivia, a look of dejected penitence from Tita, and a magnanimous response from him, and the epilogue was over.

'Poor woman!' he said, as he passed out into the road, with a vision of her pale face haunting his retina; 'it i worse for her than for me.'

# CHAPTER XXXII.

'THE MALEDICTION OF EVE.'

'Oh, Happiness!
That something still which prompts the eternal sigh.'

Essay on Man.

OLIVIA easily forgave Tita for her 'inscrutable folly.' But she thought it wise to warn her mother and Bianca that they would find her changed.

'I think,' she wrote, 'Tita has dropped into middle age, and sad though this may seem in some ways, it is resting for her friends. The anxiety I have suffered over this affair would soon have told on my nerves; but I think we may as well try to forget it, especially as it is happily over. It must have some effect on her, for anyone could see she felt it to be a crisis. I think myself she will now probably go in for a new departure in the way of work. It would be very entertaining if she should take up criticism. I dare say some of the magazines or papers would gladly give her room for a gossiping series of articles on men and things in general. But perhaps she may take life more seriously than ever, and then we shall have her trying some practical proselytizing, like Tolstoi or Laurence Oliphant. I feel I am mixing up the most dreadfully incongruous instances, but I do not know any better-or, yes, I do, though, those American writers who went and lived at Brook Farm: Emerson and lots of them. But I think Tita would live

up to some doctrine which would have the individual for its subject, and not a body of people. If she does not go to any extravagant lengths, it will be very interesting to see what she will do with her life.'

Tita realized as fully as Olivia that she had passed through a crisis—a humiliating struggle in which she had certainly fallen. But her repentance was never of the sort to lick the dust; and the remorse which she really felt in the recesses of her noble mind had to work its slow way into tolerance for the weaknesses of others. Perhaps she had borne herself too resolutely aloof from sympathy. At any rate, the sense of having been false to her higher nature worked a softening change in her manner.

As a first-fruits of her newly-acquired inner humility she was docile to all Olivia's suggestions, even to the length of penning the discursive article for Mr. Fowler's magazine. One paragraph suggests the working of a new gospel as the result of her self-disgust:

'I read some time ago of a professor of chemistry who, during his demonstrations to his pupils, dissolved a silver cup. To all appearance the precious metal was transmuted and lost for ever. But the next day the students were called together again, and the teacher added another chemical to the fluid, and behold the silver solidified, and not a grain was missing! There are two gifted authoresses of the present day whose diverse processes are not unlike the professor's experiments. The brilliant author of "Cream Cheese, some Mortar, and a Pickle-Herring" delights to take her materials from the common market and to show the transmutation of honour, faith and hope, and to leave us gazing on the wreck of these things. The other writer comes to the same common market, and with quiet handno flash of diamonds, either false or real, to blind us to the genuine issues—works out the perfecting of her scheme. Out of the commonplaceness, weakness, faltering meanness, which we begin by pitying, we see the precious metal shine imperishable.'

A room for repentance was her new gospel.

She was not sorry to turn her back on the stimulating distraction of London, and to seek peace and rest in the home life. Her sensitive self-abasement was secure from hard knocks from her mother, who had learnt the lessons of patience and humility long years ago.

Bianca considered the episode, as sketched by Olivia, discreditable to Tita, not because the fault was enormous in itself, but because she had been one to tread the stars.

Mirry, on the other hand, took the opposite view of the case.

- 'Tita,' she said, 'is one of those people who prove the truth of the saying that if you give a dog a good name he may hang a man while another looks over the hedge.'
- 'I only wish,' said Bianca, 'I could see my way clear to such cheap immunity from censure.'
- 'Oh, but it is not cheap!' Mirry pointed out. 'It is the work of a lifetime; and we none of us know what it has cost Tita to what you call "tread the stars."'
- 'Well, if she would come home and take a little trouble about the sewing meetings and Sunday-school, and see the children say their Catechism properly, it would do just as much good as writing a lot of clever books, which have nothing in them that the rich can feel or the poor understand. The only time that she ever did take my class at school she came home pleased that Willie Penberthy had left out "to all my betters" in saying his Catechism. And when I asked her why she did not correct him, she said it was best he should order himself lowly and reverently to everybody! And when I said she must not tamper with their lessons, she went further, and said she did not approve of having the young taught to be content with the station to which it has pleased God to call them, because God is

always calling us to the highest we can possibly do or be.'

'I am sure there is some truth in that,' said Mirry.

'Truth!' exclaimed Bianca; 'of course there is truth in it. And so there is in what she makes the girl say about district visiting in "Asphodels." It is a wonder why people who are so grand that they pay stewards and bailiffs and agents to look after their own affairs are never happy unless they have their fingers in everybody else's. But somebody must see after the poor, and missionaries cannot live on air, and money must be raised to pay for building and altering. Now, this bazaar for reseating the church is a very worthy object, and if everybody is fighting to be at the head of it, that is just why someone who is clever and distinguished, and so can afford to play second fiddle, should come and show the others the real way to help. I should call it quite a mission in itself.'

Tita tried hard to take the same view of it. That the object was good she was the first to allow, though perhaps not for the same reasons that appealed to the parish workers. Penborne as a community had its little failings. Their neighbouring critics said the inhabitants of the town only pronounced its name with the accent on the last syllable to dissociate themselves from Radical Camborne. At any rate, the arrangement of the seats in church was calculated to rouse their worst social passions to rampancy. The worshippers' seats were not all facing east in a convenient and reverent manner. Only the seats in the nave apportioned to the poor people did so, the others standing facing one another down the north and south aisles. The mischief began in the chancel and transepts forming two rows of seats appropriated by the aristocracy of the parish. Precedence measured from the middle of the chancel backwards and downwards, so that the best seat was occupied by the Randolphs, and the one opposite by Mrs. Tyrwhit, and the two next by the Lawrences and Tangerts, and the ones behind again by the Storcks and Mrs. Peters, and three of the leading spinsters, promoted to this eminence by the decease of Mr. and Mrs. Williams. Aunt Margery, indeed, during her lifetime habitually installed some substitute in her place, and sat with Mrs. Tyrwhit, that she might glare the more conveniently at the viceregal Randolphs; but the proceeding was out of order, and a continual bone of contention between the past and present vicarial parties. The next row of seats down the church was occupied by the neighbouring farmers and lesser lights of Penborne, headed by Mr. Briggs, whose acquirements of mind and manner told in the general estimation, and, combined with his freehold property, entitled him to take his place in front of the draper and grocer element.

Tita saw the ludicrousness of this childish class distinction, as most people do who have not themselves to smart under it; but she saw the harm of it, too, and was the first to point out the remedy. She suggested that, as the community was growing in wealth, all should join together to introduce a more becoming arrangement into their church, give up the chancel to the organist and choir—then huddled away in a corner by the tower—reseat the transepts and aisles, and provide a handsome screen. This would thoroughly upset all obnoxious class distinctions in church.

The Randolphs surprised everyone by being eager for the change.

'The house of God,' said Miss Randolph condescendingly, 'is not the place for social exclusiveness.'

The line rose to Tita's lips:

'Where'er we tread, 'tis holy ground.'

But she had grown up used to the idea that, though the pious would willingly 'sit together' with their inferiors in

'heavenly places,' it was useless to expect them to do so in earthly ones.

Beyond being willing to pay, she had not been very deeply interested in the practical development of the scheme. Now she found herself expected to work hard, and bring her highest gifts of ingenuity and patience to the use of all and sundry who chose to make a call on them.

Sometimes her forbearance was strained almost past endurance. Nothing, she thought, could have been worse than the petty jealousies and back-biting brought to light by the attempt at co-operation.

'Were there ever a set of people so mean and selfish?' she burst out at last.

'You must not judge hastily,' her mother interposed. 'More just and generous people than the inhabitants of this town it would be hard to find. You were too young to understand the circumstances attending your grandfather's sale, or you would not call them mean and selfish. My poor father lived to be quite beyond the appreciation of justice or generosity either, and, as you know, he never recovered the shock of my marrying a stranger. In his prime he could not have understood your father's intellect and character, but in his old age he could not even understand my right to oppose his will. It is just the worst misfortune of age that it cannot recognise its own limitations, so, constantly thwarted, it is constantly aggrieved. had been indulged by him in every whim, so, when he could no longer discriminate, it seemed treachery of me to turn away from him and link my life where my heart dictated. So I was never forgiven, and you know I had nothing under his will but this house we live in-not even a bit of old china or plate. Everything was to be sold. Poor as we then were, I wished to secure a few things which were dear to me for old associations, and instructed Haliburton, the carpenter, to bid up to a reasonable sum for them. My wishes were known in the district—in fact, I fear the whole circumstances were freely discussed, and made a great stir at the time. The sale was very largely attended; many of the things were curious, and all good, though old. Will you believe it? no one in that crowd would offer a sixpence on anything my agent bid for! Practically the whole town was there, and yet self-interest weighed so little that all my favourite furniture was allowed to come to me almost as a gift; and when I look round and see my mother's armchair and her father's punch-bowl, and all those treasured relics, I feel my heart swell, and I say to myself: "My neighbours gave me those."

'Mother, it was splendid! And the Cornish are considered so thrifty and unsentimental! I will never say another word against them. Why, it was just like Marshal Ney: when he was disgraced and his things offered by auction, only one stranger bought a single article.'

'No, my dear; that was not a similar case. Marshal Ney had nobly served his country; I had done nothing. However the matter stood between my father and myself, I merited no such kindness from the town. It was pure goodness, and the people who acted like that are the same to-day, under a little asperity and ambition.'

So the Storcks had patience, and, with the help of Mr. Briggs, kept the enthusiasm alight. There were several perilous passages of arms, particularly as the bazaar and fête drew near. Miss Campbell, for instance, threatened to give up her share in the undertaking because she thought, as her name began with 'C,' she ought to have been printed in the bills before Miss Rossiter, another spinster of small but independent means, who had given twice the time and taken thrice the trouble to make the affair a success.

It was Mirry who came to the rescue here, and bridged



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the deadly imminent breach by planning a fruit and flower stall for Miss Campbell to preside over, assisted by Tottie, now developed into a high school Helena.

'It will take everything we can raise,' she wailed in private. 'So early in the spring there will be very little available. But we cannot have any more quarrelling.'

Jack promised to devote his holidays to working up the scheme.

'It is just what I can do, mother. I cannot sew; to beg I am not ashamed. I will get a few apples here and a geranium plant there, and decorate the old cat's stall with ferns and ivy, so don't you trouble.'

He was now voluntarily studying electricity to save his parents the expense of putting him into the army.

'So every tenant can have new gates, and Tom can have a fair show instead of being shoved into the Church. It's no sacrifice for me. I never wanted a red coat, and as for fighting, I have licked every boy in Penborne and most in Eyelets, and I am no longer bloodthirsty.'

Small wonder that Jack was the idol of the district. Everyone knew that his upright, soldierly figure would have become a smart uniform even better than the light waistcoasts and high collars in which his harmless vanity expressed itself. No one could refuse anything to his bright young face, and he went as a messenger of peace from point to point, giving up his leisure to the work of furnishing the stall, and doing the thousand odds and ends that the poor ladies voted 'just what a man could do.' He even organized little theatrical and musical entertainments for the utilizing of rustic talent, and if he could not sing or act, he could lead the applause at the back of the hall. It is said that his loyalty was staggered for a moment when a lank young farmer, with a melancholy expression and plaid trousers, gave a dismal rendering of a 'woeful ballad' about a youth of Tattersall's, and the lieutenant of the claque

whispered: 'Aw, Maister Jack, mus' us anchor that?' But he recovered himself, and whispered back: 'Clap all the more, man, if you can't encore.'

So activity and harmony reigned over Penborne. The money, in the latter stages of the undertaking a very secondary consideration, poured in apace. A new organ projected itself into the scheme, and the wherewithal to purchase it was forthcoming.

When the busy workers came to sit, without respect of persons, in their duly ordered church, and listened to the grand tones evoked by Mr. Hoyte from their fine instrument, a peace settled on their hearts, and bickerings and jealousies were buried and forgotten.

Mrs. Storck, by tacit agreement, sat as nearly as possible where she had sat before, 'and so came in a neck ahead of all the squabblers,' as Jack was pleased to put it.



### CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUT OF DARKNESS.

'My Christian friends, it was the Butterfly as did it!'
D. Christie Murray.

AFTER his visit to the old Irishwoman, Orlando thought that he had satisfied the demands of his conscience about But it soon woke again as importunate as ever. Many possibilities thrust themselves on his attention. man was a drunkard, and perhaps a brute. He had tired of Liz before, and might again. And what was to become of her then? A hundred times Orlando asked himself that question, and a hundred times he answered that it was no affair of his. It was absurd, he argued with himself, that such a man as he was should deceive himself into thinking that he really had conscience enough left to feel the responsibility of such a woman's life in his hands, because he had been the instrument which severed the very slender thread which held her to respectability. And yet he did feel the responsibility, and many times as he tried to face the possibilities, the internal struggle for light banished sleep; and as he recognised that for the rest of his life he was to be weighted down with the sense of having done an irremediable wrong, the drops of perspiration gathered upon his forehead and white lips. And all the time he had the honesty to see that had there been no breach, and no cause for a breach, he never would have married Liz, which

would have been the only logical end to his train of argument. He knew, indeed, that he would not, could not, have done so, had the obligation been greater than it was.

Yet he should be obliged to keep himself informed of her fate, and charge himself with the duty of preventing her ever coming to actual want. And how was this to be done? He might as well regard his life as a long martyrdom if he was never to be free for a day from this mixed anxiety and penitence. He had had to deny himself before to keep her in comfort; but the strain on his slender means was nothing compared to the torment of anxiety. Suppose that man in a drunken fit should kill her! Perhaps desert her with small children dragging her down and binding her hands!

It was, perhaps, only natural that the more Orlando dwelt on the ghastly prospect for himself, the more he loathed Liz's personality. He was to be overshadowed for the rest of his natural life by a responsibility to a treacherous woman, who had never felt a moment's compunction for him. He felt sadly enough that he had many other faults to repent of—friends disappointed, opportunities misused, kindnesses repulsed; but these things only made a dreary background. The Python which was strangling him was his responsibility to Liz.

Several times he set out to seek the assurance that she was at present well and independent of his help.

He would haunt the place, he thought, and see her come and go on her sordid course. But again and again he turned back irresolute. Once he reached as far as the end of the road, and heard the old Irishman calling his wares in his weak, high voice; but a wave of unconquerable disgust swept him back.

One day, in brushing his light brown hair, he noticed a thread or two of silver. A very little thing, but it set him

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thinking gravely. Here he had arrived at middle age—had indeed, it seemed to him, lived two long lives already; and what had he to show for it all? He remembered, and felt the force of, Liz's passionate taunt: 'You are neither flesh, fowl, nor fish.' He could not be consistent even in his repentance. His self-contempt was so acute that he seriously wondered if there could be a grain of real good in his nature.

All that evening he wandered about, disturbed and distracted by the fit of despondency into which he had fallen. He had contracted the habit of going out at night rather than in the daytime, partly because he preferred to avoid, as far as possible, contact with old acquaintances, and partly because he found it difficult to sleep till far into the morning. On this particular occasion he was determined to wear himself out before turning back to his rooms. He thought he would take a look at Liz's lodgings on his way home. Perhaps in the darkness and quietude of the night he should have nerve enough to go and stand opposite the little old-fashioned casement, which he could identify well enough, high up above the old Irishwoman's best room.

The stillness of the night—almost absolute stillness, it seemed to him, as he came slowly along past the deserted warehouses—closed in round him. He drew his breath with difficulty, and shivered as if with cold. He started at the one or two indistinct outlines which passed him in the grimy gaslight.

'I am going to pieces,' he commented to himself grimly. 'My moral nerve is gone; and this thing is turning my hair gray.'

He rested a moment against a tall telegraph-post, which shot up into the blackness overhead. He was outside the house now, the gas-lamp, a foot further on, flickering on the dusty shuttered window and on the cracked and blistered door. It was long past midnight, and not a sound in the house or road. He thought he would see if there was a light in the window of Liz's room. He knew that the old man and woman lived at the back of the house, so if there was any sign of life he might guess that Liz was there.

He crossed to the blank wall opposite, and after a minute's hesitation made out the window. He thought at first there was no light, but afterwards he could distinguish a feeble illumination. Now and then the square of glass showed up transparent, and then again seemed to fade into the blackness of the wall.

He stood watching, at first with a feeble curiosity, and then with more attention. He thought probably a candle inside was burning down into the socket. It just flashed across his memory that he had often begged Liz to use candles instead of the paraffin lamp she so much preferred, and she had always pleaded for 'better light and less expense.'

Then it must be the firelight. Perhaps she was ill; those high-coloured country people often went off into consumption when brought into the squalor and pollution of London. If so, the man did not spare expense; if it was a fire it was a good one.

Suddenly the truth broke on Orlando. It was a fire indeed! While he had been standing there speculating, the light had increased, and flashes could now be easily seen. He remembered what a death-trap the old house was, with its rotten stairs and wooden partitions.

He rushed across the road, and his first kick sent the door shattered to the passage wall.

'Fire!' he shouted, as he made his way to the room at the bottom of the stairs, wondering that the smell did not wake every occupant of the place.

He waited a moment to make sure that the old people

were roused, and then dashed up the stairs and burst into the room, from which a stream of smoke was already pouring out. There was light enough to see the figure of a drunken man, asleep in his chair, with one arm stretched relaxed at his side. His pipe lay where it had fallen, and a circle of sparks radiated round it, eating their way into the threadbare carpet. Some charred paper and a smouldering cushion had already set the man's clothes alight. Little flames were travelling rapidly in lines where they met inflammable matter.

Orlando saw it was too late to put out the fire, and he tried to shake the slumbering man into consciousness. A moment convinced him this was useless, so he dragged him bodily across the floor, where the edges of the rotten planks were sucking in the fire like so much tinder, and down the stairs, calling to the old man to help him into the safety of the road.

Then Orlando rushed up the stairs again. Liz was doubtless overcome in her sleep by the suffocating smoke. A minute had sufficed to set the room in flames. He trod over glowing patches of rags, and the old curtain, which had hung across the room, had fallen, and sent up a barrier of flame and smoke.

Orlando did not know where the bed was, but pushed against it in the smoky twilight. He could feel a figure under the thick counterpane, and, wrapping this tightly together, he bore Liz, either asleep or faint, back through the dense clouds and out on to the landing. The flames had already penetrated to the cupboard, where they were fed fiercely with the firewood and lamp-oil stored there. This light enabled Orlando to make his way safely down the stairs with his burden. Once in the cooler air, Liz revived. She opened her eyes, and looked wildly around her. The old man's instinctive cupidity had driven him back into the smoke-filled house, all his intelligence centred in securing

his little hoard of money. The old woman, too frightened to be able to argue, was trying to hold her drunken lodger back from the doorway. Too stupefied to understand, the man was disposed to be quarrelsome. Liz looked and listened an instant, and then, dropping the knitted quilt which she had been clutching round her, she broke from Orlando's hold, and rushed towards the house.

'My baby! my baby!' she wailed, with a more genuine tone in her voice than Orlando had ever heard before.

The woman was in her night-gown, half faint and half mad. He started forward, and stood between her and the doorway. Their eyes met for a moment. Hers were wild with despair, careless of everything but the safety of her child. His were cool and deep, expressing a new and utterly unexpected strength. Between them rose up the memory of that last scene, when he had flung away from her in loathing, crying: 'Let me never see your face again.' And she had hurled the scorn of her heart after him in her angry 'Amen.'

'I will go,' he said, putting up his arms to bar the way. 'Where is the child?'

Liz had sense enough left for the one purpose of saving her baby.

'In the cradle on my side of the bed. I was always afraid. Quick! you are stronger than I am.'

Orlando did not wait to hear any further pleading. He knew he was risking his life, and for a mere chance, for nothing was more likely than that the stairs or floor should give way under him before he could reach the child, and then he should be smashed to the story below, burnt and buried at one sweep. Or the smoke and stench might strangle him, and he should fall insensible on the flames. One thing he did not know, namely, that in their distraction and individual preoccupations they had none of them raised an alarm, so he was walking into a hopeless trap. At that

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moment it would not have mattered to him, except that he would hardly have tied his handkerchief tightly round the lower part of his face if he had thought he was going straight to his doom.

The banisters were burning as he flew up the steps two at a time. The top stair gave way behind him.

As he plunged into the room, his hair and eyelashes flared up into flame. He passed his hand rapidly over his head without pausing.

The floor was burning in places, but he was able to make his way around the bed, and found the cradle, a sort of coffin with a wooden hood, the one thing in the room not yet on fire. He dug the limp little body out of its pillows, and, pressing it inside his coat, turned back carefully towards the doorway. There was now a gap at the head of the staircase, and the sparks and splinters whirled up in a column from the abyss.

There was no time for hesitation. It must be either a leap with a probable crash to the next landing, or he must push across the crumbling floor to the window. The floor between the doorway and the window was dropping on the lathes supporting the ceiling below, that part of the room being the first on fire. The flames ran along under, and shot up between the planks; but round the walls there remained a margin, something like the crust of ice around a pool which has been broken in the middle. The rafters would hold for a few minutes, if they were not too rotten to singly bear a man's weight.

Orlando was sure of foot and sure of eye, and crept around the further side of the room to the window in safety.

He dashed the window open, and called to those below.

Liz had been expecting him to come through the mass of flaming débris which had once been the stairs. She rushed out of the dust and smoke to the pavement in an instant. By the light of the lamp she could see him standing holding on to the window-frame with one hand, and pressing the other round the baby. She gave a shriek of despair as she thought of the distance, and realized that Orlando could have nothing by which to lower the child.

It was Orlando who shouted comfort through the murky light.

'The child is safe,' he said. 'Take the quilt you had round you; it is large and strong. You and the old people hold the corners. I will wrap my coat round the baby and drop it. I can be sure of my aim, and a light weight like this will drop safely into that elastic counterpane. You have nothing to do but hold tightly, and shut your eyes.'

He pulled his burnt hands through his coat-sleeves, keeping the child pressed against the frame of the window as he did so. He then squeezed the burning tags off the edges, and tied the sleeves round the child.

A stranger passing at the end of the road had rushed up at Liz's shriek, and a neighbour had appeared from one of the houses in his shirt and trousers. They ran to Liz's assistance with the quilt. This was only a little burnt, where the edges had hung over the bed. With the old woman they held it between them in a hollow square, near, but not close, to the wall.

Orlando leaned out of the window, called 'Now!' and dropped the child. The quilt broke away under the weight, but only a small split, and the baby rolled over into the centre, to be snatched up by Liz with hysterical tears. The old woman rushed off again to her husband, who had been injured in trying to rescue some treasure from the back.

The two men left looked up at the window in dismay.

A policeman came up at that instant, and asked if there was anyone left in the house. Only the man at the window, the neighbour explained.

'Can you get round to the back?' the policeman asked.

'No,' Orlando answered; 'the floor has given way.'

And as he spoke the ceiling fell into the room below, and a great flare burst up, lighting up the two stories, and showing the victim clinging to the window.

'Perhaps the quilt would hold again,' suggested the stranger, and under his breath he added: 'It is better the poor fellow should jump and be dashed to pieces than stay there to be roasted alive, and in a few minutes the wall may fall on the whole of us.'

The neighbour pointed out that the quilt, which would not stand the strain of a falling infant, could not possibly bear a man.

The policeman called up that the fire-escape could be there in three minutes, and the men stood back helpless.

Orlando was now on the window-sill, some twenty feet from the ground. Behind him the rafters were already dropping piecemeal into the flaming vortex below. He knew the old walls would probably crack and fall in before long, and his blistered and bleeding hands might give out even before the walls.

Drowning men are said to see their whole careers pass before them as their life ebbs away. Strangely enough, to Orlando his near past up to the moment he had rushed in crying 'Fire!' was a blank. As he hung there by his failing arms between two horrible deaths, a great happiness came over him. He felt quite young, as if the years with their sins and disappointments had slipped off him. He felt thankful to God that this thing had been given him to do. Instead of the grim street below him, and the gleaming abyss behind, he saw the sea and the country lanes. What was it? His mind was surely giving way! Instead of the heat of the flames on his scorched face, he felt a girl's cool breath, and two little hands pressing his brow, and keeping his brain from bursting. The thought of Tita flashed through the intervening years, and made him in-

sensible to the despair and pain which held him bound. What sweet irony that he should see now, looking the Hereafter straight in the face, that all the dearest possibilities of life had been bound up in the influence he had madly turned away from. The sweetest girl, the noblest woman, a joy that could never fail a man, to be unrecognised till the last! He knew now that his life was in sympathy with her nature. His life? The few breaths he was to draw before the flames sucked him down, or he fell lifeless on the pavement.

Was there a chance he might be rescued yet? If so, it must be in a few seconds. Either he felt the wall rock under him, or giddiness was approaching. With one glance out into the darkness of the road, he decided that he must give up all thought of assistance arriving till too late. Was there a chance he might throw himself on the pavement and survive? Better death than to be maimed or crippled!

He surveyed his surroundings with one more anxious glance. The glare from the window below made the telegraph-post, divided from him by only the space of the pavement, gleam like a red pillar till it shaded into darker tone above his head. A foot below the ledge of the window, from a staple in the wall, a twisted wire passed to the post. and secured it in its place. He could easily put his foot on it, and one step would enable him to clasp the post. He would slip, of course, but the wire would give him a little support, and less than his height below again was the top of the lamp. Had he nerve enough left? And would the wire bear the weight of a man? He put out his foot tentatively. The wire was taut, and hardly gave under his pressure. Then he put all his weight, holding on to the window with one hand; then, with one swing, he stretched out across the distance. One arm went round the post, and he hung a second suspended by the wire. Had he



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been an expert climber, another moment would have seen him safely on the ground.

The spectators watched him dangle an instant, supported only by one arm round the post where the wire met it; then one foot struck the lamp. The iron frame withstood the shock, but the heat soon penetrated the sole of his scorched boot, and only by changing feet could he endure it while he nerved himself for the next slip. It had all been the work of a few seconds, and the little crowd gathering had hardly time to realize his movements. The policeman sprang forward again, just as the worn-out muscles gave way, and Orlando slid from the lamp, breaking his descent on the ladder support, and fell in a heap at the foot of the post, burnt and bruised and insensible, with a terrible gash in his thigh, but alive.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON REVIENT TOUJOURS À SES PREMIERS AMOURS.

'Point after point did she discuss; And while her mind was fighting thus, Her body still grew better.'

WORDSWORTH.

WHEN Orlando was taken up senseless, someone in the crowd had knowledge enough of first aid to stop the bleeding from the wound in his leg. Two constables then took him off in the first cab that could be procured to the neighbouring London Hospital. Still insensible, they carried him up the steps and into the receiving-room on the right hand. Here his injuries were examined, while a bed was made ready for him in the men's accident ward. The Sister in charge was up, as a serious case brought in the day before required close attention. The men told the story of the rescue and accident, and roused Sister Janet's sympathy for the patient. The meanest loafer in London would have received her best attention if accident brought him there, but under such circumstances the care would have been given joyfully. Now, as the temporary wrappings were removed, she started. Disfigured and distorted as the face was, she recognised it instantly. What wave of the mighty tide we call Chance had thus flung the prodigal at her feet? On the instant her woman's heart responded to the demand

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made on her pity. He should be won back to life and to reason. Here was a great opportunity given her. Underneath her sceptical manner lay a generosity very rarely equalled. If her head was worldly her heart was heavenly, and now the devotion aroused was tireless and far-seeing.

The injuries in themselves did not promise to be very serious, but the shock to the system would likely enough be followed by a long prostration, even if delirious wanderings did not develop into brain-fever.

It was a great moment for the good Sister when the wandering eyes rested with recognition on herself. A very little explanation was given to the patient, but he turned over contentedly on his pillow.

'You were always good,' he said, as if they were alone in the world; and then added sleepily, as if she too were vanishing: 'Brusque, but true as steel.'

In a hospital more freedom of mind seems to be allowed the patients than would be the case with home nursing, and this must be a great point in favour of treating an agglomeration of cases. Very soon Orlando was allowed to talk a little, and listen freely to the conversation of his fellow-sufferers, or the kind nurses, who would turn out of their way to cheer him. But he was always wanting Sister Janet. Some of the patients were, or pretended to be, jealous; but more took a sympathetic interest in 'Sister's' devotion to the 'young swell.'

"E's one of her own sort, and it's only natural. She's a great lady—anyone can see that, though she's so plainly dressed and at everyone's beck and call. Nurse says 'er grandfather was a dook, or summat like that.'

One of the first questions Orlando asked was what the papers had said about the fire.

'They said you rescued them all, and just as you fell on the pavement the fire-escape arrived.'

These salient features did not interest the patient.

'But what became of the people burnt out?' he inquired.

She answered that one of the notices said that the house and furniture were insured.

- 'But where did they go?' he asked impatiently.
- 'They never say things like that about the poor nobodies,' she said. 'When a distinguished hero like you gets hurt saving women and babies, they follow his career to the hospital and seaside, but the poor must go where they can.'
- 'It is very stupid, then. It is as much consequence to those concerned that they should be housed somewhere, as that they should be rescued from burning.'

His insistence surprised her, and she sent around and had the information supplied. The man, she learnt, was gone off in a coasting vessel, and the woman and child were still with the old Irish couple in a neighbouring alley. The old man, having succeeded in rescuing his cash-box, was in no danger of destitution. A later conversation with Orlando threw some light—and some darkness—over the matter for the good sister.

- 'Why did you rush in without giving an alarm?' she asked.
- 'There was not a moment to be lost,' he answered.
  'I knew the rotten old staircase would burn like matchwood.'

She had kept the newspapers which gave the most glowing accounts, and when he was strong enough he was allowed to read them for himself. The first notice spoke of him as 'a gentleman who happened to be passing.' The next day his name was given: 'Mr. Orlando Carlyon, who happened to be passing.' In an evening paper he found a big heading: 'Mr. Orlando Carlyon in a Whitechapel Fire!'

It would be gratuitous to say that his hair stood on end,

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for the little he had was as stiff as a blacking-brush, but his blood ran cold. Would Tita see it? Was it possible she could understand? It was some time before he could command himself sufficiently to read the enthusiastic account. 'A notable instance of heroism,' 'magnificent Cornish pluck,' 'triumph of nerve and muscle'—who was all this fuss about? 'Mr. Orlando Carlyon, who happened to be passing.' He gave a great sigh of relief. The words 'who happened to be passing' wove themselves into a sermon for him. But how could the reporters have discovered his name and identity unless they had questioned Liz or the old people? And if they had been interviewed on the subject, what barefaced phrase-making to say 'happened to be passing.' Any way, that was the note all the papers chose to strike. Orlando pushed aside the columns of extravagant praise with a feeling of com-

'The truth is,' he said, stretching himself out, regardless of his scorched neck, 'a man who has such a name as I have must hold his head up. One might just as well be labelled Bombastes Furioso. In future I must live up to it'

Something very like two tears welled over at this valiant resolve. He knew he had entered on a new life. That moment when he hung between the flames and the pavement began another existence. Remorse had led him face to face with something above his own nature. A Presence was with him for all his future. He would have to alter much. 'Growth is the work of time, but Life is not; that comes in a moment.' That moment had come to him; but, oh, the lingering taint of bygone years!

When he had sufficiently recovered to take an interest in more mundane matters, he asked if he should be permanently marked.

Janet had to say 'Yes.' His forehead and neck had been

so frightfully burned, that it was only by grafting bits of skin that the doctor hoped to get a sound surface. Marks there must be.

- 'But they will be very interesting, you know,' she said cheerfully, though her heart quailed at the thought of how the prospect might strike fastidious Orlando.
- 'I should think they might be,' he said brightly, 'to some people.'

Tears swam in the Sister's eyes, though she laughed in the modulated way they do in hospitals, and said: 'You are a curiosity!'

- 'I should think this was the first time that accusation had ever been brought against me,' he remarked. 'It seems I have not been quite aware what a brave, not to say heroic, personage I have been, but I should have thought I was too commonplace to be curious. How little we know the good points that are in us!'
- 'Others are beginning to find them out,' she said. 'A multitude of people have been or sent to inquire for you—six hundred, I think—from a duchess to a costermonger! There was a talk of publishing a bulletin. When you are well, you must come before the curtain and make your bow to the great world which has rediscovered you.'

The suggestion did not seem to tickle his fancy at all. The idols were broken in the temple of Baal.

After a silence he asked if the Storcks had inquired.

- 'Olivia came,' she said.
- 'You are sure you mean Olivia?' he questioned.

She saw and noted the shade of disappointment hovering over his face.

'Yes, of course it was Olivia. You cannot expect people to rush from the four quarters of the globe, when, I dare say, you have let them think for the last half-dozen years that you do not care what they think of you.'

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'You know I have cared about them, though,' he said, and turned wearily over on his pillow.

Another day he began abruptly by saying: 'I wonder Tita has not married. Good and clever and successful: what do people want? And pretty too, when you know the right way to look at her.'

- 'Oh, she has been greatly admired! My cousin, Archie Thurnall——'
- 'Empty-headed puppy!' exclaimed Orlando, raising himself on his elbow. 'Did he dare—— But he was safe enough——' and he sank back on his pillow with a faint smile.
- 'And there was a more formidable suitor—Mr. Sabota, you know.'
- 'I think I remember him; he was a good fellow—and a clever one, with a wrinkled smile and a foot like a fish-kettle.'
- 'Be careful!' said Janet. 'If he survives, and I don't take the veil——'
- 'I'll risk it,' said Orlando. 'For one thing, he can't have you and Tita too. Was there nobody worse than that?'
- 'There was a man I don't know, young and handsome, that Olivia went into a fever over. I think she packed Tita off home about him. I never knew the whole truth. But we have talked long enough for the time.'

Soon after this she brought him some flowers, which had been sent to her from the country.

- 'It is my birthday: we do not quite escape from such observances,' she said with a smile, as she spread out the wreath of roses and lilies before him.
- 'You are all angels of goodness here,' said poor Orlando, with a lump in his throat. 'But I want to go away, all the same. I think I should get quite strong more quickly somewhere else. This place is so large, and there is so

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much suffering to the square inch, I feel overwhelmed sometimes. I would rather be out in the street where it is more mixed up; though I dread that, too. Out there I shall not have you. How shall I be able to get on without you? I shall have to do so soon, though, and I think I am really quite well enough to go back to my lodgings. I want to get to work,' he sighed out, as he tossed on the bed. 'And I think I want to get about it quickly, too.'

The idea had crossed Sister Janet's mind that perhaps he might dedicate the new life which had evidently been given him to some serious purpose; but she saw clearly he was not the stuff of which apostles and martyrs are made. was possible to serve God at the desk, or at the plough, or at the counter. It was not to everyone that the command came, 'Sell that thou hast, and come and follow Me.' Perhaps the call to Orlando was to lead a useful, honourable, ordinary life. Who could help him to do it? There was no question in her penetrating mind as to the direction in which his will moved. It was Tita always. But would and could Tita help him? For one thing she, Tita, had always regarded this world too much as a school-house. That would not do at all. Doubtless she had mellowed, though she was a woman of a stout warp. If her stockings were blue, she had learnt how to keep down her petticoats; but it would need the best love of her heart. Janet did not even think it likely she could both carry on her art and devote herself to Orlando at the same time. Which would she consider the nobler mission? Ah, that would depend!

- 'I can help you still,' she said aloud. 'The woman of good works has many opportunities.'
- 'I shall certainly want your sympathy. The first thing I shall do when I get away from here, will be to go back to the shipping-office,

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where I used to be before I came into my aunt's money, and see if they will take me on again, at the very bottom. I used to hate it, and I expect I shall hate it worse now. But I want to fight something, and I am too old to begin a new career. I shall want every succour that can be given me.'

# CHAPTER XXXV.

#### THE MISERABLES.

'Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart!'

The Scarlet Letter.

Liz had lost all her scanty possessions in the fire, and it was only the kindness of the old Irishwoman, who had a real regard for her, which enabled her to keep out of the workhouse. A few people who made inquiries about the sensational circumstances of the rescue gave her money and clothes for herself and the child, but except for this she was actually destitute. The man had the clothes he stood up in, which, though burnt in places, were wearable, and next day went off in a very grim humour to get work at one of the docks. Nothing loath to be out of his difficulties, he took the first opportunity of joining a vessel going round the coast to Seaham. He wrote this information, and added the advice that Liz should leave the child with the old woman, and try to get taken on at a factory, or, if she could not do that, get knitting to do, as it would be some time before he could send her money. Liz's heart sank at this suggestion; not that she shirked work, but because even before the fire she had suspected the man of meditating some stroke by which he could go off and leave her. He had gone to his work in a very bad temper, as if she, and not he, had caused the disaster which had swept away all their belongings, even what remained of the money he had

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received for his last voyage, and which he had handed over to her in a fit of domesticity.

Before she even tried to meet the unpleasant necessity facing her, a worse dilemma presented itself. In looking for intelligence of the vessel's movements, she came across a paragraph among other scraps of shipping news which threw her into a fever of distress. The Seaham magistrates had, for gross insubordination, sentenced an able seaman named Robert Wornam, of the newly-arrived Lively Lucy, to fourteen days' hard labour. This meant that in less than a fortnight he would be turned adrift at the other side of the country without a penny and without a friend, in disgrace and desperation. What hope, what chance, was there that he should right himself, or even give a thought to the woman and child he had left behind him? Either he would sink out of knowledge altogether, or the next intelligence would be that he had been driven to some crime.

In an hour Liz's resolution was taken. She would tramp North with the child, and be there when he came out of prison.

The old woman used every argument to dissuade her.

- 'It is madness to think of it,' she said. 'It would kill you to walk two hundred miles in ten days. And how will you manage for your nights' lodgings?'
- 'The workhouses must take me in for the nights. They are bound to do that, and give me my breakfast.'
- 'But the baby cannot stand such treatment. He is not very well now. Exposure will make him worse, and the cold may turn to rain any day at this time of the year.'
- 'I shall be able to walk better in the cold. And baby wants the fresh air.'

No arguments or entreaties made the least impression on her purpose, so the old woman bought a second-hand perambulator, and they packed the baby comfortably among the few clothes belonging to mother and child. Liz was far on the road to Barnet when the sun rose and shone out brightly, making the wintry scene quite cheerful. She was strong and high-spirited, and the prospect of the long walk did not daunt her. Her simple plan was to walk each day as far as she could. If she was not done up at Barnet, to go on to St. Albans; if she was not done up at St. Albans, to go on to Dunstable. She was sure she could do from twenty to thirty miles if the road and the weather were favourable.

The first day she did the thirty miles, only stopping to feed herself and the child with the provisions brought with her. The excitement prevented her feeling very tired or embarrassed as she asked to be directed to the workhouse.

She was quite kindly received by the matron, a fine firm woman, with classic features and golden hair, very little older-looking than herself. Liz told her story in full. She was listened to in quiet sympathy. Then the matron tried to dissuade her from her purpose.

'You seem so strong and willing, I am sure if you stayed in one place you could get work, and keep yourself and your baby in comfort. That would be better than this dreadful undertaking, which may end in disappointment.'

The level tones of her kind voice, and the wise expression of her calm gray eyes, smote Liz with a horrible discomfort; but she stopped her ears and her eyes, and pursued her course.

Next day she could not go quite so far, though she told herself that the stiffness wore off towards evening. She was again fortunate in being well received at the workhouse, and not compelled to conform too strictly to the regulations. She found her bright smile, and a sort of country manner, won her sympathy and help. All her anxiety was to get on, so she tried no arts to arouse much

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interest, barely speaking to any fellow-passengers on the road.

On the third day it began to rain. She soon found the frightful difference this made to her travelling. This was a long stage, too, and she was dispirited long before she had gone a quarter of her intended journey. However, it chanced that at the bottom of a hill she came on an elderly waggoner, who was fastening up the iron drag under his large covered van. He saw that she was going in his direction, and offered to give her a lift as far as she went on his road. He raised the perambulator into the empty waggon, and Liz was able to sit in shelter and nurse the poor little wailing child. She was afraid the child's crying would annoy the old man, but he took no more notice of it than of the leaves blown along beside the hedges; and when he found that she was bound for the city, he promised to take her the whole twelve miles over which his errand took him. He patted the baby's knitted bonnet from time to time in a kindly, inconsequential way, which made the nervous little creature shriek, in spite of all Liz's reassuring caresses. In vain the well-meaning old man tried to convince his passenger that to walk the twelve miles which remained after their roads parted would be an impossibility. She got through the miserable afternoon somehow, and the next day it was only showery, and the baby was quieter. The roads were heavier, but it was what she called a short stage-some twenty miles-and she was cheered by a woman at a farm-house giving her warm milk for the child, and inviting her to rest by the fire. She was now half-way through her journey, and though she felt she could not keep on doing such long distances, she knew her strength would hold out to the end.

On the fifth day she made her first mistake in the road, taking the highroad to Stafford instead of to Stone. This threw her a mile or two out of her way, and depressed her

sadly. She knew she could not afford to make mistakes, but she recovered her spirits with the thought that at the very last, if necessary, she could take the train. The old woman had warned her before she left that they would take away her money at the workhouses, but she found it was restored to her again, so that the few shillings she had would go a long way. The day she missed her way was the most tiresome of her journey. The rain settled down persistently, and pushing the perambulator became wearisome work. She almost thought it would be easier to carry the child, particularly as he was now very restless. She made up her mind that she would try to get the matron at the next workhouse to buy the perambulator, and let her start with the child in her arms. But the next stopping-place, where she arrived worn out and dejected, afforded the one experience of rough and unsympathetic treatment she had. In the morning she was glad to turn out into the rain and mud as soon as they would let her, in spite of the baby's being certainly worse. She was still encumbered with the perambulator, and do what she would the driving rain would splash in about the poor child. She pushed on with a determination born of despair. The raindrops coursed the tears down her sodden cheeks. All her comfort was to think that in three days it would be over. Her first inquiry this night was for the doctor. Doctor and matron looked grave; they knew there was small chance of that poor little mite ever seeing the daylight again. Every kindness was shown Liz here, and now, in the anxiety about the child, she almost forgot her purpose. She blamed herself for not having taken more care, for not having endured the delay and discomfort of waiting at the last house. But it was too late now. The one day's exposure had finished the poor infant's power of endurance. In the early morning it died. The matron made all the arrangements, and managed that the mother should be pained as little as possible by

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having to leave her baby in a pauper's grave. There was some question as to the right of putting the expense of the burial on the union instead of on the parish from which Liz had brought the child. But somehow the difficulty was overcome. Here again the matron begged the poor wanderer to wait and try to get work instead of going on to face disappointment. But it was all no use. Whe once the child was buried, Liz was in a fever to be gone. She had lost two days, but she assured the kind matron that she should be in time.

'What will you do?'

And even that experienced woman hesitated to say, 'What will you do when this man comes out of prison, and perhaps flings you aside?'

Liz answered readily enough that she had first gone to London from the North, and felt sure she could work in a factory again. They gave her a few shillings for the baby's things, and with unheeded words of caution let her go on her way. It seemed to her she could walk forty miles now with more ease than ten while she had the perambulator.

The second day found her at Seaham. She discovered there was still a day before the prisoner would be liberated. She was tired out, and her feet, unused to walking, were sore and blistered. She had money enough to pay for a small room in a grimy court, running back from the quays. Here they allowed her to rest. She wanted to husband her funds, that she might have something to give the man on the morrow, so she only bought herself some bread. She was almost too miserable and anxious to be able to eat this. The time passed in something between sleep and stupor.

The next day she waited, a little apart from the other prisoners' friends, till the gates opened, and three or four men came out. The big sailor was conspicuous among them. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but strode on doggedly.

Liz let the group disperse, and then followed him hastily.

He was surprised, and not much pleased, to see her. She was looking worn and thin, and the fortnight's troubles had told more on her than on him.

- 'I thought you would have no money and no friends,' she said, 'so I came.'
- 'How did you get the means to come here all the way from London?'
  - 'I walked.'

is dead.'

He looked at her with a stupid curiosity.

'I never should 'a' done that,' was his comment.

He did not so much as offer her his hand, but he felt a kind of awkward compunction. Perhaps he would have shaken hands if they had not been surrounded by the houses leading down to the sea.

- 'I have a room under Manning's sail-loft,' she said.
- 'We can talk there. I will tell you all about my journey.'
  'It was a great thing to do,' he said judicially. 'But you
- should have stayed and looked after the child.'
  'Bob,' she said, raising her eyes imploringly, 'the baby

He staggered back a minute.

'Dead!' he said, and then, with a flash of anger, 'Then why are you here?'

She bit her lip to keep herself from crying out.

In a minute she said: 'Now we shall want one another all the more.'

He felt he was getting further and further out of his bearings. Her assumption of a right over him annoyed him.

'Well,' he said, 'I am not coming with you now, any way. After a man has had a fortnight working for the

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country he wants his liberty, and the first thing I do is to wash down the taste of it at the Welcome Home.'

'It is natural you should feel like that,' she said. 'I have brought you some money. You can do what you like with it.'

She handed him the few shillings she had managed to hoard. He motioned her hand away at first. Then he said, 'I gave you mine, and it went in the fire,' and counted it out slowly and put it in his pocket.

He turned away to the public-house, and she went back to her room under the sail-loft.

She threw herself down to wait, and fell into a dozing sleep. At last she felt hungry, and thought she could wait no longer. She asked the woman of the house what the time was, and being told six, she went out.

It was more than six hours since she had left the quay, and she expected by this time the man was drunk and incapable. Perhaps he would forget where she was, and wander away until he lost himself. There was nothing for it but to go to the Welcome Home and inquire.

She looked about her as she entered, but soon saw he was not there. She was going to ask for a glass of beer, and then remembered that she had no money. There was nothing to be done but to inquire point-blank.

There was a man behind the counter at the time, and he was not ill-disposed towards the little woman in black, who asked her questions so anxiously.

Yes, he remembered to have seen a sailor such as she described—tall and broad, with black hair and beard. But he had gone hours ago.

Could he tell her where he had gone?

The man looked at her curiously a moment. He pitied her heartily.

Most likely he had gone on board the Plevna. The captain was short of hands, and in a desperate hurry to

315 . get out of port. He was not usually very particular, and this time the agreement was made on the spot, and the barman had seen the sailor sign the papers. He had even heard him exclaim, 'What luck!' when the captain explained that he should be glad to weigh anchor within the hour.

Liz's cheek turned gray. The man pitied her all the more.

'There is a chance,' he said, 'that they did not get off this tide. You had better go and inquire.'

Liz made the hopeless inquiry.

The Plevna was gone.



#### CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE GREAT SOLUTION.

'Yet there is a fellow, whom nobody knows. Who maketh all free On land and sea!'

BARRY CORNWALL.

ORLANDO had been three weeks in the hospital. Though weak and irritable, at the end of that time he was quite sufficiently recovered to return to his lodgings and independence.

Janet's inquiries about Liz had so far set his mind at rest that the thought of her had not been a disturbing influence in his convalescence, and the 'sore burden of disquietude' had fallen from his soul. But the sense of responsibility remained—a something to be faced manfully, not groaned at as a martyrdom.

Before he set about buttressing himself into a useful future, he would see Liz, and have a clear understanding. This was the first thing to do. This settled, he would throw himself on Mr. Peters' mercy, and plead for the chance to make himself uncomfortable in the meritorious attempt to fit himself into the great social machinery of life.

He had taken down the old Irishwoman's address, and directed the cabman to drive there on the way to his rooms in Red Post Street.

After some trouble he found the old woman, and, at his inquiry for Liz, she turned aside her grizzled head, and wiped away a few very real tears.

With difficulty Orlando extracted the whole story. When he had heard it, he could scarcely believe he was standing in the midst of London at the end of the nineteenth century. It was more like an undertaking of the Middle Ages.

'She left here ten days ago, with only a few shillings in her pocket, to push her way to Seaham, two hundred miles and more, weighed down with an ailing infant—and all for what? That she might be ready to meet a drunken sot, whose first impulse would be to shake himself free of her.'

Thus Orlando reviewed the situation, and the old woman's dismal misgivings ran like an accompaniment to his foreboding thoughts.

'Had she recovered from the shock of the fire?' he asked. 'Perhaps that had unhinged her mind.'

'No,' the old woman answered, 'she was clear enough in her head. She planned it all out, and went off through Barnet to St. Albans, intending to walk as far as she could, and stay the nights at the workhouses in the big towns on the road. She said, as a girl, she had walked as much as thirty miles in a day, and could do it again. If it had not been for the weather being all against her, I think she would have walked it well enough; but with the rain, and uncertain meals, and poor clothes, I doubt if she will ever reach through to the end of it. And if she did---' And here the old woman broke off with a sob. 'I think,' she went on, 'it would be better she should break down at one of the workhouses. There they would take care of the child, and no one would harm her. She would not listen to a word of reason before she went; but that man of hers is a brute, and if they have kept him in prison for his violence, he will not come out any sweeter than he went in.'

- 'And you have not heard anything from her since she left?'
- 'No; she said she would write when the meeting was over. She wasn't much of a scholar, and I wish she'd been worse, and then she wouldn't have been able to spell out the case in the paper. I wish I thought I should ever hear!'
- 'What do you think will have happened to her?' Orlando asked. 'Why are you so sure she will come to harm?'
- 'What but harm can she come to, first to undertake such a wild journey as that, and then to face that great hulking sot, who is already tired of her?'
- 'She must have been very true to him to do it,' Orlando said, divided between a new impulse to do justice to Liz's virtues and an old sense of aggrievance.
- 'Women are made that way,' the old woman continued.
  'But when men are tired of them, it only makes matters worse. I pray Liz may get to the prison gates too late.'

The old woman could not tell him exactly when Liz had hoped to reach Seaham, or which day the man was to be let out of prison; and Orlando had to leave her with a fragmentary understanding of the situation.

Not a moment's peace could he secure, and kept arguing the subject over in a circle. What was the use of having saved her from the fire, if he were to leave her to starve? Then his mind would travel over the possibilities of the case, and he would picture her, sometimes fallen by the side of the road, sometimes stranded penniless in a strange town, sometimes facing the angry blows which she would not raise a hand to ward off. Murder was what it would be.

At last he took his resolve. He would follow her to the North. The police could soon find out for him if she had reached Seaham. If not, she had fallen by the way, and he would retrace his course along the great highroad, and

could not fail to intercept her sooner or later. If she had arrived at Seaham, and Robert Wornam was still in gaol, she must be shadowed till the meeting was over, and he had shown how he meant to treat her. If he was at large already, and the meeting had taken place, she could scarcely have vanished in a day, and left no clue as to her whereabouts.

Orlando settled his plans, and found himself at Euston in time for the midnight train to the North.

He could not afford to break the discomfort of the journey with any luxurious alleviations, but he found it a kind of rest to be rushing out into the night.

Arrived at Seaham, Orlando went across to the policestation. He had not a very definite story to tell, but the authorities were willing to render him every assistance at their command in his investigations. They could tell him at once that Wornam had been released the day before.

The inspector suggested that at the prison they could probably tell him if anyone had met the prisoner.

Orlando accordingly went to the prison, with the constable told off to help him in his search. No one knew if Wornam had joined anyone on leaving the prison gates; but a woman had made inquiries about him, and been informed as to the time of his liberation.

The description of this woman corresponded to Liz in every particular. Young, rather under middle size, with dark hair and eyes, dressed in black cloak and hat, and, the officer added, looking anxious and worn; but he was sure she had no child with her.

She must have spent the night in the town somewhere. The public-houses on the waterside and the cheap lodgings would be the most likely places in which to find her, unless she and the man had left the town together.

Orlando thought it very unlikely that either of them had money enough to take them straight away from the town.

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The policeman then took Orlando to make a round of the lower-class inns. After some fruitless inquiries, they entered the Welcome Home, and the barman was called forward to be interviewed. No one of the young woman's description had stayed there, but he remembered at six the night before someone had come making inquiries about the man Wornam.

- 'And did you know anything of the man's movements?'
  Orlando demanded.
- 'Yes,' the barman answered, with a mixture of fluency and caution. 'This house is much used by seamen, and is, in fact, well known as a rendezvous for sailors wanting berths or for owners or masters wanting men.'

The policeman could have expressed the matter more explicitly, but was not called on for any explanation.

- 'Do you know what became of the man?' Orlando asked directly.
- 'Yes; he agreed to join the Plevna, and left with the captain to go on board and sail at once.'
- 'The woman came to inquire afterwards, you say, and you told her this? What did she say or do?'
- 'Nothing,' the man answered. 'She looked surprised and faint-like, and I said it was possible the vessel might not have left the harbour, and she had better find out before she gave up heart.'
- 'Do you know where she had stayed or where she went?' Orlando asked.
- 'No,' the man replied. 'I felt sorry for the poor thing, and went to the door to see which road she took. She turned along the quay, and I lost sight of her in the twilight. That is all I know.'

Orlando wondered what could have become of the child. That no one had seen it pointed to her having taken refuge in a cheap lodging-house, where she could leave it in someone's charge while she wandered about making her inquiries.

The barman suggested two or three houses, cheap, and close to the water. The policeman's instinct selected the court round Manning's sail-loft.

The morning was now wearing away, and Orlando was feeling desperately tired, in spite of his excitement. He had met complaisance from every quarter, partly because he was obviously ill and anxious, and partly because he had the natural gift of inspiring obedience. His manner had all the quality of haughtiness with the disagreeable eliminated, and his courteous requests were always met with willing alacrity. Having made up his mind as to his course of action, he had pursued it without any regard to the possibly disagreeable consequences to himself in being mixed up with this squalid complication, but he was conscious of the compromising incongruity, all the same. And while he made his way from police-station to prison, and from prison to inn, and from inn to lodging-house, his strength was ebbing away.

He could hardly stand when the policeman stopped before an open doorway, giving on a paved passage, and aid:

'This is the most likely house, sir.'

An elderly and overworked woman appeared, in answer to Orlando's rap, from a room at the further end of what was evidently a common passage-way for all the occupants of the tenement.

- 'Did a woman and child arrive here the day before yesterday?' Orlando asked.
- 'A young woman came about five, but she said her baby had died four days before. She asked to have the cheapest room we could let her, and she is now upstairs, worn out, I suppose, with her tramp and trouble. She went out yesterday evening, and no one heard her come in, so I suppose she is sleeping late to-day. I thought it was a pity to wake her, or I should have offered her part of my breakfast. But

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it is time she was up. She has only paid for the room for two nights.'

'Go and call her,' said Orlando.

But in his heart he thought it was probable Liz had flung herself over the quay when she found that the *Plevna* had sailed.

Presently the woman came back with an anxious expression on her dried-up face. She had knocked and received no answer, and when she tried the door she found it locked. She had knocked louder, and still received no answer.

'I cannot unlock the door,' she explained, 'because the key is in the lock on the inside.'

'We must break the door open,' the policeman said.

And he and Orlando went up the stairs, and by a combined effort burst the lock.

All was quiet and orderly.

Liz was there in her black frock, lying on her face across the bed.

The policeman looked round suspiciously for bottle or knife. There was nothing—no smell of chemical, no trace of blood. But the woman was dead, for all that.

The doctors found it a very interesting case. There was no disease, no accident. The woman had sobbed herself to death, without the shadow of a doubt.

At the inquest Orlando, paler and thinner than ever, gave evidence as to identity with perfect composure. The doctor's testimony was emphatic. 'Death from natural causes' was the verdict. No inconvenient questions need be asked; no reflections could be cast on anyone. Orlando's intervention had been all on the side of law and order, and if it resulted in no other good, it saved the parish the expense of a pauper's funeral. The case did not offer any features of extraordinary interest, and the press did not make any investigations into the subject, and so Orlando's name did not again ornament the newspaper headings.

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The word 'finis' was written across the problem which had been tormenting him for the last two years. But as he turned his face Southward relief was swallowed up in a sense of the misery and futility of the tragedy from which he was flying. How far was he guilty? A broken heart was no mere figure of speech, but surely he was not responsible for that. 'I have much to answer for,' he cried to himself, 'but not that.'



#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### THE MINUET DE LA COUR.

'Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?'—Solomon's Song.

It was some time before Orlando felt strong enough to face the ordeal of interviewing his old employer. But his determination never wavered, and he was troubled with very little apprehension as to the result.

Mr. Peters had never forgotten a debt of gratitude which he owed to a certain Captain Williams, under whom he had sailed forty years before, and had always regarded Orlando as the heir to the obligation. That Orlando had left him eagerly when an independence fell in his way was natural enough. The old gentleman did not flatter himself that he made his office a beehive for drones to take their pleasure in. An independence meant a break; but he had followed Orlando's career with interest until it was lost in obscurity. That 'the boy' would turn up again some day was a settled belief with him, and his obligation to the family would compel him to give him another chance in life.

When Orlando did come, he made it very clear that his expectations from life were very humble. 'Getting on in the world' was a lost ambition. He wanted the work to give him a more definite position, and security from want, which his precarious revenue from the mine could not

assure. Accordingly he was allowed to resume his work on his merits, and found himself very little further on than when he first entered that office as a schoolboy. He accepted the discipline with the best grace he could.

The renown which had surrounded his name after the Whitechapel fire gave him no satisfaction at all; and of society's overtures he could truly say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'

Janet Cartwright never lost sight of what she considered the one great chance of happiness for him. He and Tita must meet, and the past be forgiven. It seemed to her so plain and simple that there was nothing but for one to say 'Come!' and the other to do it. But she was not dealing with such straightforward natures as her own, and she had to 'do good by stealth.'

'It is a very open stratagem, however,' she remarked to herself, 'when you make a feast, and tell each of two people that you have bidden the other.'

She could count on the assistance of her father and aunt, as they had been Orlando's best friends, and in his darkest hours would willingly have succoured him, if he would have tolerated any sympathy. As it was, the Canon's reluctant hand had been the last to loose his grasp and let him glide into outer darkness. Miss Cartwright, safeguarded by her position, in wealth and ease, from the iron sharpening of conviction which contact with the rough, working-day world produces, held a creed of sweetness and beauty, which had once seemed to Orlando ideal, and appealed to his nature more forcibly than her niece's militant instincts. Now he knew that such a creed was for the leisured and the good, but the charm of it remained to its exponent.

Back to these friends Orlando was willing, even eager, to be drawn; and Janet was shrewd enough to guess that it would be easier to throw Tita and him together in a formal way than to force a reconciliation by any pleadings and arguments.

'I am not sure that the days of miracles are over,' she wrote to Tita. 'But one must not look for them in the outward and tangible. You and Mr. Carlyon are not likely to meet accidentally this side of sixty. And yet, as he wants to be brought back into his old life, and you only can do it, it is necessary for his happiness that you should meet. If you are the woman I take you to be, I am sure you will be glad to help me to throw a little brightness on the dreary life of an old friend. Come to town as my father's guest. We will have a grand dinner-party—a score of aunt's notabilities, all strangers to you two. So shall the ice be broken without constraint. If it proves that the last ten years have built up a barrier which cannot be broken down, go your ways.'

Tita had become habituated to her attitude of endurance, and often told herself that restlessness was perhaps, after all, only part of the human curse—the malediction of Eve:

'Some more, some less, but of the whole Not one quite happy.'

She had tried, and not altogether unsuccessfully, to find an outlet for 'the secret longings that arise' in work. Though no pessimist, the conviction hovering over her at this time—that, although one could never be happy, happiness did not matter—had its roots of sadness as well as of faith.

The news of Orlando's part in the fire thrilled her heart with an exquisite enthusiasm, and his injuries and illness kept her in an agony of suspense. She hardly dared to open the newspapers, sent by her rashly-considerate friends, lest she should find that his bravery had cost him his life. What would existence hold for her if Orlando died?

In the silence and the twilight she would stand at the

window, and gaze wistfully out into the gathering gloom, which veiled and yet bridged the barrier space, and, as the birds darted to and fro, tremblingly ask herself if they might not be arrow-flights of feeling made visible, in which the spirits of the absent return to us.

But when he was well again, and still the world went round in its dull way, her nerves settled down, the Evangeline-like heart-throbs died away, and she hotly accused herself of making a fool's paradise by supposing that the future held any possibilities for her in which Orlando could have a part. True, the vague impulses and indefinite hopes were half of her life, and the more beautiful half; but it was a dream-life, beautified by her own imaginings, and fed with the suggestive fancies of her mind. To merge this dream-life into the concrete savoured of desecration.

But if Orlando was ever to come back into her life, there must be a beginning, so she would join Janet's conspiracy, though she felt a miracle would be much the easier way of the two. She could not refuse, but the mere resolve to consent steeled her into a hardness which did not promise well for any outflow of sympathy.

While Tita was nerving herself for the encounter, Orlando was giving himself up to very rash hopes. It seemed to him that the miseries and disappointments of life would vanish away if Tita would take him back. He told himself twenty times that he was prepared to find that she was no longer the unformed girl he had known. He had left the flower; he was to see the fruit. A middle-aged woman, with a strong mind, iron principles, and a cultured will—this was what he was to meet. But through his wisest reasoning he would see flashes of a little golden head, with always a smile for him, and a dozen times he turned as if he really felt light little fingers on his arm. He could not remember if he had ever kissed her—perhaps when they were

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babies; but they had breathed an atmosphere of endearment as naturally as the air, and it surged up with the rising tide of memories. And yet—he smiled as he remembered it—she had not seemed sweet to all! He recalled the remark of a sharp school-fellow: 'I cannot think how you can like that lank little Storck girl. She makes me feel as if I were living in a cathedral with the mercury down to zero!' It had pleased him that she should be cold to another, though sweet to him. What if she had changed, risen to a conscious nobility, which should make him feel the rarity of the air around, and that his vesture was in rags? He had left her without a moment's regret, as a part of the accompanying circumstances of his youth; he had soon fixed his fancy elsewhere; he had never sacrificed a pleasure, nor modified an action, for her sake; what right had he to suppose that he had been more to her than she had to him? Then he answered himself that really she had been all the world to him, only he had been blind, intoxicated, mad, all these years. Now he was awake, sober, and sane. Yet was he sober and sane?

As the time for meeting drew near, his excitement grew so intense that his days were dreams and his nights a fever. He was so conscious of his heart that he felt he could have put his four finger-tips on it. What did the tumult mean? He could not remember to have felt so in his life before, and there had been stirring moments in his chequered career. He had loved his wife—it must have been love, for he had been true to her with an absolute fidelity; no thought of Tita, say, had stirred a vagrant yearning, though he had kept an image of her, dusted and garlanded, in a niche of his innermost heart. Yet the winning of his wife had never fluttered his pulse and turned his head. If ever he had felt like it before, it was when he found himself possessed of wealth beyond his ambition, and with, as he thought, the world's prizes in his grasp. The mere thought of a parallel

chilled him to the marrow. Was it selfish greed which made him want to absorb this woman, her greatness, her goodness, her influence, her wealth even, into his life? million times better he should have perished in the fire. Then, in a torrent of self-reproach, he would protest that he was not worthy to breathe the same air with her. he always came back to the conclusion that it was a matter of destiny. Merit had nothing to do with it. It was her fate to complete his life. He thought of the trite saying: A woman's life is a tragedy if she does not marry. Every man's life is a tragedy if he cannot get what he wants. What would his life be if—— But he would not think of it. What a waste of time and brain-power it is to thresh out the old discussions about the relationship of the sexes, and 'Is marriage a failure?' One might just as well start a controversy as to whether it would be better to have the tide governed by the sun instead of the moon. Nature would work in its own way. Nature, destiny, chance, 'the angels call it Providence.' Then he bowed his head, and poured out a prayer that he might have grace to use this great happiness as a sacred loan from heaven, if it was really to be his, and if not that he might die.

He tried to check the passion of excitement by telling himself he should make himself ill, and then not be able to go; but he knew he should go if he were dying, and 'dying there at least may die.'

Janet Cartwright would have hesitated to have kindled such a fire if she had known of what intensity Orlando was capable; but she, too, had her convenient theories of destiny. When she had found Tita open to persuasion, she had felt the responsibility shifted to her.

When the great evening came, Orlando was careful not to be either the first or the last guest to arrive. Miss Cartwright's drawing-room was half full as he entered, erect and tense. The flowers and lights and bright dresses made a somewhat bewildering picture; but it seemed to him Tita's figure drew his glance as absolutely as it would have done if she had been standing alone in a blaze of light upon an empty stage.

She was seated at the side of one of the windows, with a dark dull red silk curtain drawn at the back of her chair. A lamp just behind made her light waves of hair shine like an aureole. She wore a gown of gray silk, lavishly ornamented with steel beads, and her long white arms gleamed through sleeves of gauze. She was speaking to two or three clever-looking men as he came in, and her pale face shone on them.

Orlando moved towards her, as if he were drawn on rails; but half-way across he remembered his hostess, whose mild brown eyes were surveying him sympathetically from behind her gold-rimmed lorgnettes. He bore down on her hurriedly, vaguely aware, though he had not distinguished her, that Janet, in her serviceable black silk, was hovering near, with a smile on her lip.

Without any preamble, she bore him off to Tita, scattering the wise men to the east and west on various pretexts.

As Tita, with a composed little gesture, moved her skirt aside from the seat beside her, Orlando's memory reverted to the dreams he had indulged in as he came along in his cab, and he blushed to the back of his neck. At that moment he had a sense of remoteness from her keener than any he had felt in the years since they had met. He sank down beside her in silence.

Janet had turned her back. It was left to Tita entirely to retrieve the situation. Her impulse was to put her hand on his bent head, and whisper in his ear that she was glad to see him; but what she did was to lean back in her chair, and draw him up with her eyes by the back of his neck till he faced her, and then she said: 'Am I so very much altered?'

Poor Orlando! It seemed to him the coldest thing she could say.

'I think you must be,' he said.

Tita understood the protest perfectly, and it flattered her.

'You are, too,' she said, and smiled till she showed her even little white teeth.

He did not understand her so well, but that smile was like the sunshine of old times.

- 'After all, you are not much changed,' he said. 'It is having pictured you all these years in a brown holland apron and sun-bonnet.'
- 'All these years!' she repeated to herself. Aloud she said: 'You could not have thought much about meeting me if you did not foresee me in something more gorgeous than that.'
  - 'Oh, you are not too gorgeous,' he said.
  - 'Then tell me how I disappoint you.'

But he was spared the embarrassment of replying by the movement from the room. He knew he was to take her in to dinner, and as she passed her fingers through his arm he thought that they trembled. Perhaps it was the light, perhaps it was the palpitation of his own heart.

At the table the light fell full on his face and hands.

- 'Oh, your poor hands!' she exclaimed.
- 'They are not improved in appearance, are they?' he said, stretching them out before him.
- 'Yes, they are!' she rippled out in exactly the old tone of her girlhood.

He looked round at her, and met the glance of her beautiful eyes.

But first one and then another of the distinguished guests wanted Miss Storck's word on their discussions, and it maddened Orlando to see how quickly the repartee flashed out in response, as in water face answereth to face. How was it possible she could remember about Æneas parting from Dido, or Sir Walter Scott's vagaries with Weyland's Smithy, when his whole being was crying out for her attention? And she was just as eager about it as any of them, and her steel beads glittered like chain-armour as she flung back an opposing argument.

Before the dinner was over Orlando fell into deep dejection. It had been presumption, he said to himself, to suppose that such a woman as that was going to resign herself to him at his bidding. She was as good and kind as ever, and far more beautiful and sweet, but as far away from his poor wrecked aspirations as a star. Yet every second with her was priceless, and he thanked the kind Canon in his heart for so soon letting him return to her side, after the ladies had retreated to the drawing-room.

Tita took it for granted that he should come to her, and they had a pleasant chat about old times and places, the many alterations at Penborne, and the fate of mutual friends. Orlando was interested in everything, from the dreaded Advent of the Curate Spirit down to the disastrous love affairs of the faithful Selina.

Tita alluded to his part in the fire.

- 'We were so proud of you!' she murmured.
- 'I did not deserve it,' Orlando said uneasily.
- 'And Mrs. Peters told mother that you had taken up your work at the office again.'

It was all, it seemed to Orlando, like the distribution of prizes at a school treat.

'I wondered if you would approve of that,' he said, looking up quickly.

Unintentionally Tita raised her eyebrows. She said instantly:

'Of course I am glad for you to go to work.'

'She means me to understand that it is no affair of hers, wretched man that I am!' thought Orlando. 'She is too sweet to make me feel the air rare; but she has made me feel that my vesture is in rags.'

Discouraged as he was, Orlando hardly took his eyes from Tita's face, and was the last guest to go. But he went at last, with an obvious resignation.

Janet pursued Tita to her room.

'I shall have to be back at work at the hospital before you are up to-morrow,' she said, 'so I thought I had better look in on you to-night.' Her tone was somewhat constrained. Then she exclaimed, in her direct way: 'Why, oh why, did you wear that Joan of Arc dress?'

Tita was profoundly disturbed. The question reached her mind through a confusion of scintillating thoughts and feelings.

- 'I am sorry that you do not like my gown,' she said slowly. 'But it cannot be old-fashioned. I thought it out for myself, and I hoped Madame Stephanie had carried out the idea rather well.'
- 'Oh, it is a beautiful thing!' Janet interposed—'a dream of a frock! If you had been going to a fancy-dress ball as a Diana of the twentieth century it would have been ideal. But I wish you had worn something more human to-night.'
- 'Then, you think I have been a failure?' Tita said, with an oblique smile.
- 'I think you have frightened Mr. Carlyon, instead of encouraging him. And he came so hopefully. Did you notice how he came into the room? I was afraid for a moment that he was going to forget us all, and that we should be treated to a dramatic impromptu, but he suddenly shifted his course half-way across to you, and came up to aunt like a marionette that had had the wrong string



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pulled. I dare say bringing you together in that way was rather ill-considered. It is I who have been the failure.'

'You see it will need the miracle, after all,' said Tita; and she turned away her head that her friend should not see how deeply the failure touched her.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### PARIS AND ŒNONE.

'And when he came to himself, he said, I will arise and go.'

Luke xv. 17.

Orlando went through much sadness and heart-searching as he looked back on the evening spent with Tita. The reaction from his extravagant hope brought him acute pain, but after awhile he asked himself if he need be disheartened by such a fantastic repulse. He was not worthy of herperhaps he never could be-but he could and did repent of the sins and follies which had kept them apart, and a noble woman's love was infinite. Did she or did she not love him? That was the question. And after reviewing the meeting at the Cartwrights' in every possible light, he still felt he could not tell. The Tita of his boyhood would never have come at all if she had not meant to pardon him everything, but even that did not imply such love as he wanted. Perhaps she regarded him only as a brand to be plucked from the burning. Yet she had not looked at him like that, and she was not one to pluck a brand from the burning with a trembling hand. She had glowed over his daring at the fire; but, then, she had glowed over Professor Archibald's reading of the Assyrian hieroglyphics! The meeting was not a fair test, and he was nothing but a coward to hesitate to avow in a more direct way the passion which had grown up in his heart. Better be a moth and

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singe one's self at the candle flame than perish out in the darkness and cold.

Of course, Orlando did not pursue his arguments so far without giving a very straight stare in the face to the unpleasant fact that he was a broken-down man of the world wanting to woo a beautiful and successful woman, whose merits and charms he had ignored till he had drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and sat down to a very bad fit of indigestion. That was a hateful truth, but there was another truth to set against it: he was ready and willing to begin over again, if he had to break stones by the road-side for a living. If Tita would love him, if she would be only his friend instead of his wife—if she dared not make the sacrifice of sharing his life—he would live down his past. For thousands of years the history of the world had been saying, 'Love is enough.'

He took it as an earnest of a thorough change in his disposition that he found the dull routine of his work at the office far less irksome than he had done when a vision of a gilded leisure floated uncertainly before his youthful fancy. Mr. Peters found it safe to rely on his application and judgment, though there was no hope of 'the boy's' developing into a business genius.

It was a relief to him, too, to find how easily he slipped back into his place at his friends' firesides, as well as into his work at the office.

When he paid his regulation call on Miss Cartwright, he found, as he had expected, that Tita had fled back to Cornwall. But by this time the keen edge had gone off his disappointment. He had seen her, and she had corresponded to the ideal in his mind; with courage and patience all would be well.

To the Fotheringays he was a frequent visitor. Success and affluence had made Mr. Fotheringay more tolerant of his facility, and Olivia had always been very fond of him.

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They did everything they could to rehabilitate his self-respect, and Canon Cartwright's wise sympathy helped in no small degree to enable him to overcome his 'wayward will and anxious fears,' and to climb up the rugged path of repentance.

The discovery of gross mismanagement on the part of his agent at Eyelets suggested to Mr. Peters the desirability of having the affairs of his office there thoroughly investigated, and with the severest formality he proposed that, as Orlando's holiday would be drawing near, he should have two days beyond his week to go into Cornwall and sift the matter.

An old man's meddlesomeness, chance, or Providence, wondered Orlando.

But he determined to make the most of the opportunity, to whatever cause he owed it.

He had not been into Cornwall since Mr. Williams' death, but as he found himself whirled back to the surroundings of his boyhood, an odd wave of enthusiasm swept over him, and he hummed Allan Cunningham's lines:

'It's hame an' it's hame, hame fain wad I be, An' it's hame, hame, hame, to my ain countree!'

Why had he never fully felt its charm before?

It was now late autumn, a season when elsewhere the chills of October had banished all sense of summer, and the wind and frost had battered and draggled the poor flowers that had tried to brighten the hour of decay. Here it was summer still. The exhilarating air was bland with the mildness of the surrounding seas, and in creeks and sunny dips of the country a tropical vegetation flourished. The train cut its way through clouds of perfume by banks where the roses flowered the whole year round. And even when the high and open moorland was reached there was a blaze of purple heather, with here and there a lingering tuft

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of gold—'when gorse is out of blossom, kissing's out of fashion.'

At Camryn Orlando left the train, and had his bag transferred to the coach, which connected the port of Eyelets with the great highroad of civilization. How many a time had he made that change, often enough not too graciously! In those days the coach had set him down at the crossroads, where Uncle George's old gray pony had been waiting, with more likely than not Tita watching eagerly for the bus, which had a knack of always being a little later than usual. To-day there was no one at the corner, though a long trail of shepherd's-beard, waving in the wind, had looked to Orlando as they dashed up like the light cloak of a small, slight woman. Indeed, Penborne now had a bus of its own, and the meeting of the roads was no longer a point of interest in the route.

A thousand memories knocked at Orlando's heart as the horses trotted along the smooth level highway, deserted as far as the eye could reach, yet wide enough for the traffic of Piccadilly to have rolled with ease along its breadth. On either hand were rough towers of stone, many in ruins, with masses of corroding iron looking like the skeletons of some huge monsters of a prehistoric zoology. Away to the left were the trees of Pengeagle, springing up beside the little river which meandered down to the sea between banks tinctured by the mineral deposit to hues of copper and gold, which put to shame the tones of lingering foliage hanging above.

The early evening was closing in as the coach reached its destination. It was Monday evening. Orlando's holiday had begun on Saturday afternoon. He had thought of rushing down to Penborne through the night, and so stealing two days from the uncertain future. But he had decided that he would honour the Sabbath, and keep it as holy as he could, go down on the Monday, investigate

matters at the office, and then walk over casually to see the old friends of his childhood.

So he put up at the old inn, which stretched its blackened oak beams right out on the somewhat evil-smelling quay.

Sleep was not to be hoped for, but he strolled out past the new houses which literally climbed the cliff, and held on to every point of vantage, and a few minutes brought him to the thyme-scented downs which overhung the town. The moon was high overhead, and lighted up headland after headland to where just beyond his vision he knew that Penborne lay.

The next morning's work was extremely disagreeable to him, but he was not without a certain satisfaction in gripping the circumstances of the case. He was gaining a useful insight into his business.

He had nothing to decide, only to send particulars to his chief, and then he was free till that day week.

Orlando lunched heartily, somewhat amused to find how keenly his appetite responded to the invitation of the hostess's old-time cookery. Marinaded pilchards, Cornish pasty, ubiquitous chicken and ham, and a 'squab' pie that baffled description, formed a not bad meal for a man who felt that an hour or two must decide the question of his life's happiness.

Thus fortified, he took the direct road to Penborne, six miles of track without a level inch. A little more than an hour brought him to the outskirts of the village.

Strange little girls with skipping-ropes suspended their play to let him pass. He felt a veritable Rip Van Winkle when he scanned that scattered flock—just let out of the imposing school-house—and did not recognise a face. It was a little comfort to him to detect in one boy a certain cheeky responsiveness, backed by a horrible catapult.

'That,' said he, 'is a Penberthy or a pixie.'

He strode along down the hill unconscious of the many glances directed towards him. Some of the girls at the pump and in the doorways knew him, though they had grown out of recognition, and the whisper went round, 'Mr. Carlyon has come back.'

He only met one face that he remembered, and that was that of a poor old crazed creature, who hobbled about the streets on two sticks. She had been a horror to him ten years ago, and now her discontented comment, 'You think you're very fine, I s'pose?' jarred on his nerves.

A stranger answered his knock at the Gables. He would have been thankful for the certain grip of Selina's granite hand.

'Yes, sir; walk this way. What name?'

Who or what had he asked for? The young girl's mechanical propriety acted as a sort of sedative. He followed her along the well-remembered passage, down and up the shallow steps, and into a room full of warmth and light.

There were two people in the room: Mrs. Storck and—

For the moment Orlando experienced no disappointment that Tita was not there. Mrs. Storck had put aside her knitting at the knock on the door. She was a little near-sighted, with the straight-backed near-sightedness of natural failure.

She made a little step forward in her courteous way before she recognised her visitor.

- ' Mother!'
- 'My boy!'

Those were all the words they had to say after these years. The tears trickled down her cheeks as Orlando held her against his breast, and kissed her faded hair in silence.

Bianca, a little alarmed at this agitation in her mother, hurried forward, and wheeled up the couch. Her greeting was only a little pat on the shoulder, but Orlando knew they took him back to their hearts.

Bianca asked a hundred questions, and interposed a hundred comments. Where had he come from? What was he doing at Eyelets? Which way had he come?

- 'If you had come in across the moors, you would have met Tita. She has gone wandering off that way, on the pretence of finding some late blackberries. We will have tea; no one knows what time she will be back. She often goes. We never wait for her. Do you take sugar now? No? Too Cornish still? Bring the saffron cake. Not hungry? Well, I am!
- 'I think,' said Orlando nervously, 'I will go and see if I can find Tita. It is rather late for her to be out alone.'
- 'She is not very helpless, you know,' said Bianca, smiling.
  - ' No, of course not,' be said.
- 'It is very cold, though,' Mrs. Storck added illogically. 'If you do not find her before you come out on the Eyelets road, you must turn back. She may have altered her plans.'
- 'It does not do to count too much on geniuses,' said Bianca. 'But if you go out the old lane through the meadows, you will probably find her on her way home.'

Orlando thought he could trust his instinct. What could be more perfectly fitting than that he should come on her sitting on a spur of rock, looking westward into the glorious sunset?

He pushed on quickly. They had last walked that road together on the night before Uncle George's funeral. He shivered as he glanced back across the lurid interval. The prize he might then perhaps have grasped might now be out of his reach. He walked on and on with the depressing fear that he had missed her, till at last he was within a stone's-throw of the highroad he had traversed an hour before.

Not seated on the highest rock, but conscientiously



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searching the brambles that fringed the field side of the hedgerow, was Tita.

He walked quietly up to her, with the schoolboy impulse not to give her a moment to prepare herself for the meeting.

She turned with a little frightened glance as his step paused beside her.

- 'At last!' said her eyes.
- ' For ever!' said his.

She let her basket fall, and the blackberries flowed over into the ditch. She held out her hands, her gloves scratched and smudged with the overripe berries.

'Must I?' said Orlando, hesitating to take them.

Tita looked up gaily in his face.

- 'Nobody axed you, sir,' she said, and put them behind her back.
- 'Tita, your mother and Bianca were very good to me. They told me you were here. Are you going to let me come back to you or not?'
- 'I do not see how I can prevent it,' she said perversely.
  - 'Do you wish to prevent it?'

Tita looked down. There were tears in her eyes she did not choose he should see.

'No, Orlando,' she said quietly.

Somehow here in the twilight and solitude she seemed the Tita of long ago, not the clever woman of the world he had met at the Cartwrights'.

'Let me draw off your gloves. I want to kiss your hand on that,' he said.

He passed his arm around her, so that he held her hands with his left hand while he drew off the sodden finger-tips of the gloves with his right. Did she feel how his heart thumped? Would that plead for him? What ecstasy to hold her so near! When she knew all, would she thrust

him away? Or would she say what God had forgiven she could forgive?

The gloves came off at last, and Tita surveyed her hands critically. Had she really forgotten she was leaning against his shoulder?

'There is not much to choose, I fear,' she said, as if her every thought were engaged with the scratches and stains. 'There is a cross on the mount of Jupiter, and lines of fortune long enough to gratify a Jew.'

Orlando examined them.

'What a shame to treat them so!' he said, and folded them together, and kissed them both again and again.

Tita drew them away at last, and stepped towards the stile, leading into the road.

- 'The dew is falling,' she said, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.
- 'Yes, and your mother warned me to take care of you; but we need not go home yet. Bianca said they did not expect you for hours.'

Tita did not know which had been exaggerating, Bianca or Orlando, but Bianca came off with the damage of the doubt.

They forgot the blackberries and the basket, and wandered off on a by-road, and it was not till Pengeagle gate faced them that they realized how far they were straying from home.

- 'Let us go in and electrify Mirry,' suggested Tita. 'It is just as well we came this way. She and Arthur would not like to be left out in the cold.'
- 'I hope she will not mention fatted calf,' said Orlando. 'It is the one straw I could not stand.'
- 'Oh no. She says it is the last prick that makes the worm kick, so she will not goad you beyond endurance.'

An Indian war-whoop announced their approach long before they came in sight of the house.



## PARIS AND ŒNONE

A covey of young people darted across the drive.

'How Tottie is grown!' said Orlando, as the children vanished into the twilight at the sight of a stranger.

'That is Buttercup,' said Tita; and she pressed the hand in which her own was lying, before the significance—how Time flies—could reach Orlando's mind.

The children had made a détour, and reported Aunt Tita's arrival, with a 'long, strange man.'

'I knew it was you!' exclaimed Mirry, meeting them at the door, and shaking hands with Tita, and kissing Orlando at the same time. 'Where have you come from?'

Then Tita remembered that she had not asked.

Mirry insisted that they should stay to dinner; dress was immaterial at such a time as that. Tita trembled for the introduction of the best robe, but they were spared that.

Mirry took Orlando over the house to admire some of her improvements.

'I am sure you will appreciate them,' she said graciously; 'especially when you hear dear Jack's thoughtfulness has enabled us to spend a good deal of money that we thought he would be obliged to have when he got his commission. I had this room panelled,' she said, in explanation. 'We talked of a frieze, but I thought by the time the children grew up the fashion would be as extinct as the dado.'

Orlando could genuinely admire the changes. By some happy stroke of nature—the law of averages, some of her neighbours thought—Mirry's taste was exquisite.

She was full of apologies as they came towards the dining-room.

'You must excuse rather a rough meal,' she said. 'This is what the poet calls an "unpremeditated lay." There is only cold meat, but there is plenty of it. Arthur says with pigs at the price they are it is cheaper than poultry, and goes twice as far. But it always does seem to me almost brutal to roast dear little young pigs while they hardly

have any bones at all. Yet I don't know why anyone should be sorry that they are taken away before they know sin or sorrow. You like fish, I remember. When William Jenkin catches anything especially good he is sure to send it to me. The dear, kind man sent us this John Dory—a delicious fish, too; but somehow, I must confess, I never can feel much appetite for it—such a great, funny head! it always puts me in mind of Raphael's cartoon, you know, "The Draft of Miraculous Fishes."

Orlando was glad he had lunched well.

Mr. Pennant greeted the wanderers with the same hearty hospitality as his wife.

'Walked from Eyelets!' he exclaimed. 'What are you doing there?'

Orlando explained with gusto that the office business had required his attention.

- 'Well, you know, between ourselves,' said Mr. Pennant, 'I think it would pay Mr. Peters to employ an agent entirely there. Bickley is mixed up in too many things to pay proper attention to anyone's interest but his own. The place is growing, too. I think it will be the most important port from Plymouth to Falmouth very soon. How would the berth suit you? Look about you while you are there. But, of course, you will stay here, and have your traps sent up. Waller can fetch 'em first thing tomorrow.'
- 'I think,' said Orlando, reddening, 'Mrs. Storck will expect me there.'
- 'Mother is sure to have had your room aired,' said Tita, reddening also, though she spoke airily enough. 'Selina will lend you what she calls her cat o' Persia shoes; I dare say she has them warming by this time.'

They all laughed heartily.

'Perhaps we ought not to have stayed away so long,' she added uneasily.

'Set your mind at rest about that, my dear. By this time your mother is reading the newspaper upside down, and Briggs has dropped in to help Bianca hunt that 1\frac{1}{4}d. through the bazaar accounts. For two clear-headed people they appear to have got their figures into as inextricable a muddle as one could wish. Upon my word, if he managed my affairs like that, I should have no great opinion of him. But I never found him at fault but once, when I put a 7 instead of a 9.'

The dinner passed off very happily, though Mr. Pennant nearly came to disaster when the roast pig was to replace the vaunted John Dory.

'I am afraid Mirry hasn't a----'

But Tita gave him such a translucent kick under the table that he said: 'A pineapple! But the—the grapes are grand.'

A pheasant turning up unannounced enabled Orlando to satisfy Mirry's solicitude, but he was too much moved by their kindness and Tita's proximity to be able to eat.

The moon he had contemplated, hungry-hearted and anxious, the night before, lighted him back to Penborne almost delirious with happiness.

'The world is too good,' he said with emotion. And then, like a great cloud blotting out the moon and stars, came the thought: 'If Tita should send me away now!'

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

#### LOVE.

'O gather, then, the rose while time thou hast, Short is thy day, done when it scant began; Gather the rose of love while yet thou mayst.'

TASSO.

THE next morning Orlando came down to breakfast punctually, a circumstance which had never been known in the old times, when he had divided his days and nights capriciously between his aunt's and the Gables.

In the morning light he looked haggard and anxious, and the gray gleams showed in the hair, drawn rather far down on his forehead to soften the unevenness, which neither time nor art could entirely remove.

In Tita's absence his face looked bleak and sad, in spite of the desperate effort he made to command his spirits and manner.

He thought it just her last touch of perversity to be late; but when she appeared, in a light linen frock which was like nothing but a glimpse of blue sky, Mrs. Storck explained apologetically that she was not at all an early riser.

'I lie abed,' said Tita, raising her head with mock dignity, 'to be as much like good Dr. Johnson as I can be.'

In truth, she had lain awake thinking until daylight, and then had dropped off into a short sound sleep. Refreshed and elate, she had risen to make an elaborate if unobtrusive toilette. She had chosen her summer's gown, because it was youthful and fresh—what Janet Cartwright would call 'human'—and became her well. With every golden hair in place, and her sweet face wreathed in smiles, she had come into the breakfast-room like a gleam of sunlight. Her mood of gaiety was really most unjustifiable, but a wise woman does not want any justification to be happy. Orlando had come back; that was enough. That he was careworn and silent was only another incentive to vivacity.

In the middle of breakfast she started up with a sudden concern.

- 'Oh, those blackberries!' she exclaimed.
- 'And my basket!' said Bianca.
- 'I am sorry,' said Tita, in real confusion.
- 'Can't you quote some great person's absence of mind, to keep you in countenance?' Bianca asked. 'Alfred the Great burnt the cakes, if I remember rightly. But what did you do with them?'
- 'Did you put down the basket when we got over the stile?' Tita asked, turning to Orlando.

Orlando had seen the basket fall, but had never given it a thought till now.

- 'That is not fair,' he said, not knowing what else to say.
  - 'And you are mean,' retorted Tita.
- 'I suppose it is as much my fault as yours. We will go and try to find it presently,' he suggested.
- 'That is the best plan,' said Bianca. 'And I will tie on Tita's sunshade and your walking-stick before you start.'

This exchange of banter did not really lighten Orlando's gloom, and when Mrs. Storck proposed that a note should be sent to Eyelets to have his luggage forwarded, he only replied tragically: 'Not yet.'

As soon as he and Tita were alone, he spoke the thoughts that were uppermost in his heart.

- 'Before I can come here to stay I must know the position in which I am to stand. How can I make you understand and believe me? Why did you let me go away, and steep myself in folly and misery? Did you not care?'
- 'Orlando, you do not know what you are saying. You have no right to ask that. But I will tell you. I used to think in those first desert days, if I could have locked my arms around you, I might have kept you from harm.'
  - 'Perhaps it might have been so-who knows?'
- 'And afterwards, when you went from bad to worse, I thought if I had been placed at your right hand I might have helped you up the difficult ascent which leads out of Avernus.'
- 'I like that idea,' said Orlando. 'An artist might make a fine allegorical picture from it for this material age. But why weren't you there, Tita? Was it all my folly? I loved you in those old days as a boy can love. I knew I should never reveal it, for I always had that mad commonsense which prevents a fellow from running his head against a post, though it won't save him from drifting into quick-sands which may swallow up body and soul. The dream that you might be an heiress daunted me, too—more, I think, than the other phantom that we both should be poor and helpless. But if I never spoke out in words, you must have felt that you were more to me than all the rest.'
- 'Oh, I knew if all your fine friends and we two were out in a boat, and there was any question of drowning, it would be me you would want to save; but I did not give that instinct a name. And you so soon forgot me!'
- 'I did not forget. Other things came and overlaid the memory—the cares and troubles of this world, if you will. You seemed to me to belong to another world—a world that I had done with.'

They had reached the rough plot of ground where cultivation ceased at the edge of the moor.

Orlando threw himself down on the dry mossy turf.

Tita leaned against a huge boulder that the Titans might have flung about in their play or strife.

She felt there was something to come, which Orlando hesitated to avow. But his next words surprised her intensely.

'Tita dear, you must not be vexed with me for asking, but didn't you ever wish to marry?'

Tita could not imagine why she felt annoyed at so natural a question, but it seemed turning the tables on her in a most unfair way.

- 'I do not know what right you have to ask impertinent questions,' she said, clenching the firm little fist of her right hand, and bringing it down smartly in her left.
- 'It may be an unwise question, but it is not an impertinent one,' said Orlando quietly.

And he stretched up and parted her hands, unclosing her fist with his strong fingers as if hers had been indiarubber.

His strength was an agreeable irritant to her.

- 'Oh,' she said mockingly, 'if you are going to turn dictionary-maker like my pattern Dr. Johnson, I may as well retire into the background.'
- 'If you could understand what is in my mind, you would not be flippantly hard-hearted over such a trifle as that,' he protested.
- 'If it is a trifle to you that I nearly—— Oh, Orlando, how dare you torture and taunt me all in a breath?'

And Tita tore away her hands and covered her face.

Orlando sprang up beside her in an instant.

'My darling, my precious Tita! what have I done? Let me see your face. Great heavens! is it possible that you love someone else?' The note of agonized suspense touched Tita, miserable as she was with her own reflections.

- 'No, no,' she said, with something very like a sob; 'but because I didn't was what made it worse.'
- 'What did you nearly do?' he asked, in a soothing tone of voice, smoothing back a stray end of hair behind her ear.

Tita was silent and downcast.

'Did you nearly let him kiss you?' he asked, smiling. 'It was very wicked, as you must have known. But it might have been worse.'

Tita brushed away two tears hastily.

'I shall hate you if you go on like that,' she said.

But she let him pass his arm between her and the hard stone.

- 'What is it all?' he asked kindly. 'Why need you mind telling me anything? I love you a million times better than everything else in the world. If you do not say that you prefer someone else, I will promise to forgive you. Now, what did you do?'
- 'If I must tell you, it was just this: I was so fond of you that I thought if I could marry someone who was like you it would be better than starving for a love I was never to have. So I let him make love to me, and I liked it, and I should have let him kiss me, and have given myself to him, but for the shadow of the poplar-tree flashing on the pavement.'
- 'Now I know what poplar-trees were created for!' exclaimed Orlando. 'I have always thought there was no dignity about them, and I never heard that they were any use; but now they will be the kings of the forest for me. However,' he added, after he had given her a moment to recover her composure, 'of course, I am not going to make a jest of anything so serious.'

In his heart of hearts Orlando thought the idea of this

high-souled, tender-hearted creature, driven by a divinely-ordained impulse to such lengths of despair, was enough to make the angels weep; but, wily in his own interests, he thought her self-abasement would make her less harsh in her judgment of others. He was not really at all shocked. He had not spent his life in the concentrated purpose of a single love. Perhaps he loved her as well as she loved him, but it was not in the same way. His love was more infinite—was not so infinitesimal. But after a moment's thought he exclaimed:

'My dear little girl, do not torture yourself about such a fantastic fault as that. No one in his senses would blame you, except the poor fellow you disappointed. If it had not been your destiny to wait' ('for me,' he was going to add, but wisely only made a suggestive pause), 'you would have married and been happy ever after, and probably never have given another thought to such an unworthy wretch as I. If that is the worst sin on your mind, happy, happy you!'

He was silent a few moments, while Tita stood beside him, and remorsefully drew together the edges of a long slit down the back of her glove.

His face was serious and miserable enough when he turned towards her again.

'I want you to sit down on that flat stone and listen to what I have to tell you,' he said.

And he gravely handed her to a ledge of rock a few feet from where they had been standing.

He flung himself down at her feet and began:

'You have seen enough of my life to know that selfishness has been the keynote of all my sins and mistakes. When I was a young fellow just starting to work, my chief dream and ambition was to get money. I was not clever enough to make a fortune, so my only hope was to inherit my aunt's.'

'Orlando, I must interrupt you to say it might have been very selfish of you to want Aunt Margery's money, but no one could have been nicer than you were when you thought her husband's friends might have it.'

Orlando put aside Tita's little olive-branch remorselessly.

- 'I had nothing to gain by making myself unpleasant to the only kind friends I had, and, if you were to have the money, everything to lose. Don't you see that?'
- 'Do you mean that if I had kept the money you would have married me for it?' Tita asked breathlessly.
- 'Did you ever think of renouncing your claim if it should have been given to you?' Orlando cross-questioned.
- 'Well, no,' said Tita uneasily. 'I never thought of that. Would that have been better?'
  - 'Better than what?'
- 'I suppose I have been a very foolish woman all my life,' Tita said, with a mixture of misgiving and annoyance; 'but I do not know how it happens that you always seem able to make me out in the wrong about everything.'
- 'Do be reasonable! What am I making you out in the wrong about now?'
- 'Why, because I did not take the money and give it to you—renounce my claim, as you call it.'

Orlando looked at Tita searchingly.

'I see it all!' he exclaimed. 'You moved that weak old man to leave me the money, so that I might be as free as air. This explains what I never could understand—your saying that I could have forgiven you, that night before the will was read, as we sat here in the twilight. Oh, Tita, if you had told me of your generosity then! Or, a thousand times better still, if you had never let me have the money.'

Tita's face was now as wretched as his own.

'I thought I was doing it for the best,' she said. 'If I

had allowed Uncle George to die with his will unaltered, and you had married me, people would have said-----'

- 'The truth: that I married you because you had that money.'
- 'I do not believe it!' said Tita indignantly. 'You might not have cared for me much, but you were never so mean as to marry me for the money. If you had been, why should you have hesitated to make sure of me while you thought I should have it?'
- Because I was an exceedingly careful fool. Until all was known, there was the chance that the money-and none of us knew how much or how little it was-might be scattered among the Williams family, and then my little Tita's portion would probably not have been enough to satisfy my ambition. But, looking back, I do not think it would have been for your fortune I should have married you, always supposing you had been willing to have me when the riches and pleasures of this world had been in your grasp instead of mine; but I should have done it without realizing how far above rubies was your price. Whatever we say, the fact remains that I took my portion of goods and went. That I wasted my substance in riotous living you know, and I have no faintest excuse to offer. I never had any uncontrollable passions, and such sense as I have has always been at my command. A wayward willthat has been the bane of my life. My marriage was undertaken in as deliberate an impulse of selfishness as that which made me buy the best horses or the softest arm-chair. I loved my wife; it would not have been pure selfishness to have married her else, I suppose.'
- 'Oh, that is fine-spinning of morals!' Tita interposed hastily. 'She was so beautiful and gracious, I do not think anyone could wonder that you wanted to marry her. I did not.'
  - Did you ever see her?' he asked, in surprise.

'I was at your wedding,' Tita answered, recalling all the strain and misery of that scene.

'It is impossible!' Orlando exclaimed, sitting up. 'You must have dreamt it. With your eyes upon me, I never could have gone through that farce.'

'Hush! you should not speak like that. It was not a farce to me. I sat in the north gallery and watched it all; and when you said "I will," it seemed to me that the walls rang with the words.'

Orlando passed his handkerchief across his forehead and lips. The air was chilly and the ground was cold, but big drops stood on his face.

'It seems to me,' he said, 'as you tell me little by little what you have suffered in the recesses of your own soul, that the rack and the thumbscrew were trivial and crude in comparison. I would give my life to be worth it. I have squandered my fortune—your fortune; I have betrayed my better nature; I have neglected you for years; I have been idle, drunken, dissolute, contemptible. It seems wild beyond the idlest dream to hope that you can forgive me. But a nature like yours impels the best that remains in a man. You shall know all there is to tell, and then you will hold my fate in your hands.'

Then, in plainest words, he told her all his selfish extravagance, his meanest indulgences, his dire shifts for money, his ruptures with all his friends, his still more fatal connection with Liz, and the midnight despair of his subsequent state. The recording angel could not have given a franker summary; though before the end Tita's face was as haggard and grim as his own, and he hardly dared meet the glance of anger and unmistakable repulsion in her eyes.

'So it is for this I have suffered and waited!' those eyes said dumbly.

That was the supremest penalty Orlando had to pay for

his wasted life: he had sinned, and she must suffer. No remorse, no repentance, could mitigate the blow.

Tita sat like a figure of stone through his recital.

At last all was told. He had owned every sin of which he was conscious. He had urged nothing in extenuation. He had endured the torture of making her suffer. What was the end to be? If her love revolted from him at this point, there was no possible hope or remedy. Time could not alter the facts: his repentance could never be more sincere than it was at that moment. Her love might die, but not his past.

After a long silence he looked up hungrily.

'Tita, mayn't I touch your hand?'

The hand, which had been hanging at her side, was drawn up quickly, as if the suggestion burnt her finger-tips.

Armed with despair, he tried another argument.

'Do you think it is really love which cannot pardon a repentant sinner?'

'It is not for me to pardon,' she said coldly. 'Or if it is, I do.'

'It is not pardon,' he said, 'which stands aloof and lets me trail my wrecked aspirations in the dust. The Bible you believe in says: "When I fall, I shall arise." You say, "When you fall, lie there!" For the last year, with the thought and hope of you, I have turned my back on the past. When I thought the world was over for me, into the hush of that moment God sent the memory of you, and I was happier waiting in the fire for death than I had been for years. If I had thought that the toil and endeavour was to be henceforth alone, I should have prayed for death, and not escape. A vision of my good angel has been with me in my battles with self and the devil. But I will not plead that only you can help me to walk uprightly; let that consideration rest with your own

heart. I will try to lead an honourable life if I have to face the world again friendless. But this I say, I shall never be happy without you.'

Tita was not unmoved by his clever paralepsis, but it seemed to her pity at such a moment, even if directed to the highest ends, was a false instinct, and she thrust it back as she had done his suggestion to touch her hand. She would not be fascinated or electrified into a mistaken position. If not 'soul to soul,' never 'hand to hand.'

She rose, and paced impatiently the length of the grassy path in front of the little island of turf.

'I hope you believe in the possibility of one's character being regenerated,' Orlando said, as she paused before him, white to the lips, and trembling from head to foot. 'God has made me a king and a priest, and has promised to remember my sins and iniquities no more. Are you, a fellow-creature, going to take a higher stand than that?'

Tita hesitated as she met his glance of infinite anxiety.

'You talk very freely of your repentance,' she said. 'A sense of your faults—a feeling sense of them—is certainly to be wished for. But say you have it; what then? No amount of burning will make tares wheat.'

Orlando buried his face in his hands, and dropped into an agonized silence.

Tita moved away unsteadily. She was wrestling with an invisible power.

Presently she came back, all her nerves steadied, and a faint flush in her cheeks. She took away Orlando's hands from his face, resting her glance a moment on those suggestive white weals, and then she said: 'God has told me that His grace can keep you from falling. His grace is sufficient for us both, and His grace only. There is no difference.'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;You are sure you see it clearly?'

'Yes, perfectly sure.'

She reseated herself on her rock beside him, and they stayed some minutes in solemn and utter silence.

Orlando's more elastic nature rebounded from the despair of the last half-hour, but he felt he did not know what to make of her self-evolved conviction. Was it a matter of love or of reason?

He ventured to look at her pale, calm face, slightly averted.

'Turn and look at me,' he pleaded; 'I shall understand you then. Your face tells your feelings more than that of a less-guarded woman. You rarely smile, and very rarely blush; but the contraction and expansion of the pupils of your eyes, and the tension of the muscles around your mouth, appeal to those who study you far more forcibly than the broader effects of frowns or smiles or tears. Your face is like a bit of Crivelli's painting: it is almost too expressive.'

- 'What does my face tell you?' she said, in a perfectly neutral voice.
- 'That you do not feel justified in taking it upon yourself to decide that I am altogether tares,' hazarded Orlando.
- 'That is a great deal for a mere human eye to see in a plain face of flesh,' she responded. 'Perhaps my face is too expressive.'

Oh, the music to Orlando in that faint change in her voice!

- 'If it is too much for the sunbeam to steal through the prison bars, if it is too much for the dew to fall on the parched ground, if it is too much for human love to show itself like the Divine, perhaps it is too expressive.'
- 'You are talking blank verse, Orlando,' said Tita, in gentle expostulation.
  - 'Be thankful it is no worse,' he said.

And Tita smiled.

### THE HERITAGE OF EVE

'Do you want me so very badly?' she asked.

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Orlando stood before her speechless. 'The Paradisaic abyss had opened again.'

He held out his two hands to take hers, and drew up her light weight by her wrists, till her heart lay unresisting on his, and their lips met.



#### LOVE AND ART.

'And the friendships old and the early loves
Come back with a Sabbath sound, as of doves
In quiet neighbourhoods.
And the verse of that sweet old song,
It flutters and murmurs still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

My heart goes back to wander there,
And among the dream of things that were
I find my lost youth again.'

Longfellow.

BIANCA's basket came home by the hand of Willie Penberthy.

'Mr. Briggs foun' un, miss, as he were comin' in across the Fuzzy-close, from the look-out house, goin' to the mine. So he met me comin' out o' school, and give me a trifle to bring un over here, fer he said he were sartin and sure he were Miss Be-anchor's. . . . Thankee, miss; I don't mind if I do have a piece o' cake. Mother says a bit o' something afore dinner always pays in the end.'

Willie did not think much of the proffered glass of milk, but took it also, as he knew the casual caller need not hope for anything better in Miss Tita's home.

And to all appearance there was the same truth in it as in brandy-and-water. For while Bianca stood by him

smiling, he was moved to favour her with the promptings of his worldly wisdom. Turning over two currants unctuously in his mouth, the boy went on seriously:

'Foax say, Miss Be-anchor, that Mr. Briggs have foun' out what yer fayther done up to the mine afore he were bust up, and that 'twill be the fortin of un. But I says afore he makes a fortin Miss Be-anchor ought to have her say. Missis here '—with a nod along the passage—'is gettin' old; Mrs. Pennant don't want nothin' o' nobody. Miss Livvy's gone, and Miss Tita 'll never come to want while they Board Schools do buy up so much books and truck; but Miss Be-anchor ain't got nobody nor nothin'. So afore he turns a sod, miss, jest you see about it. They say he is goin' gie up Pengeagle, becos if he can make the old mine go, he'll be richer than squire; and,' he added with great solemnity, as he fingered the shilling silently in his pocket, 'I'd a-believe it.'

So rumour was on the right scent for once.

The East Wheal Jemima Ann was going to be worked again, and Mr. Briggs, allowed access to all the books, papers, and appliances of the late Herr Storck, confidently hoped to re-introduce the process which had worked so well under the German engineer. The stewardship at Pengeagle was to be given up, though Mr. Briggs said he would give an eye to everything 'just as a friend.'

Tita's acceptance of Orlando precipitated the denouement which had been working out all unsuspected under her eyes.

'I should not like to go far from mother,' she said, when the inevitable discussion of ways and means could not be put off any longer. 'If Mr. Peters accepts the proposal of placing Orlando at Eyelets, we could take the house the Shellys used to live in, and then we could all meet every few days.'

Bianca, heroic if little, faced the family conclave.

- 'I am going to be married, too.'
- 'Impossible!' 'To whom?' 'Not Briggs?' were the agreeable comments the dauntless little woman had to meet.
- 'You have all been willing enough to acknowledge Mr. Briggs' merits in the past—his cleverness, his good humour, his integrity, his innate good-breeding. I have heard it all a hundred times. Now you are asked to accept him as one of yourselves. I hope you will do so. Otherwise I go to him.'

Never before had Bianca been known to issue an ultimatum. She had come to be regarded as one of those people whose fortitude is more conspicuous in their manner than in their matter. But now there were tears and prayers and prophecies, all to no purpose.

- Mr. Pennant, the angriest opponent, was the first to come round.
- 'Starting the mine again was the only thing that could make it tolerable,' he said. 'He is sure to make it pay. And if he works Herr Storck's idea, it is only fair he should make it up to the family somehow. That is what people will say.'
- 'He is worth a hundred of me every way,' said Orlando shamefacedly.

When he was alone with Tita under the medlar-tree, he could not help congratulating himself on the turn events had taken.

'We get let down easily,' he said. 'As a fact, you know, I must be the most selfish brute living. There is not a thing to be said in my favour. Briggs could buy me up ten times over. I have thrown away my chances in life, and I never had any virtues. Sometimes I think I must have lost the last scrap of manhood to be willing to take so much when I have nothing to give. If I could live without you, I believe I would run away now.'

- 'Please to make haste, then,' said Tita archly, 'for I was just thinking how you could help me in my life work. We shall be poor, you know, and I cannot keep a poor man's house and write books at the same time.'
- 'I have been thinking of that,' said Orlando. 'It seems to me there has not been much spare time since I have been here, and when we are married I shall want you more, and not less. For instance, here is a button off my waistcoat. I think my heart must have swollen since I have been home; I cannot be putting on flesh at this pace.'
- 'Oh, it is the roast pig and squab pie,' said Tita gaily.
  'But the button is gone altogether,' she added in dismay.
- 'Never mind,' said Orlando; 'you can put on one of another sort. I am not as particular about trifles as I used to be.'
- 'But I am!' exclaimed Tita. 'I thought the day you came, as you moved about the room at Pengeagle, while Mirry assured you it did not matter how you were dressed, that you were the best-dressed man I had seen since you went away.'
- 'I did try to put myself as straight as the arrangements of the Curlew would permit,' owned Orlando. 'But you cannot have studied dear old Briggs much. The breeches and gaiters he tramps about the farm in came from Bond Street, I can tell you. And if there were a button missing from his waistcoat, one would want to shriek.'
- 'I suppose I have not studied him,' said Tita thoughtfully. 'Olivia used to say, when she was vexed with me, that those star-gazing people never saw what was under their noses. But I have been so used to Mr. Briggs doing what Mrs. Peters calls "beau-ing" Olivia that it never struck me as strange that he should be so willing to help about everything Bianca took in hand.'
  - 'Are you vexed about it?' Orlando asked, delightfully

# LOVE AND ART

conscious of his new privileges. 'You have said the least, but you seemed the most surprised.'

- 'There are various reasons why I cannot say much,' Tita continued. 'You see, I have been preaching all my life that social distinctions are a poison and a snare, and in future I want to live in sympathy with the fundamental facts of human nature.'
- 'Breakfast at seven, something attempted, something done, to earn a night's repose,' suggested Orlando.
- 'I only hope you may feel as light-hearted about it in a year's time,' said Tita; 'the something attempted, something done, will be common hard work. I remember well enough years ago, when it was a question of writing an essay or putting in the cabbage-plants, if the weather was favourable, the cabbage-plants won the victory; the divine afflatus could wait.'
- 'I could put in the cabbage-plants,' said Orlando dubiously.
- 'I dare say you will have to, if you decide on not running away. But if you do your work at the office you cannot do mine at home.'
- 'Then, how can I help you, dearest? You forget what a wooden-headed fellow I am. But if I could do a little good in the world, I think I should feel happier in being happy.'
- 'It has long been a dream with me,' said Tita gravely, to demonstrate the possibilities of life for the host of people who suffer from the sense of having narrow means. The man with a salary of £120 a year——'
- '£125,' corrected Orlando, with an expression of anxiety and dismay.
- 'The young man with £120 or £125 a year teaches himself to consider it would be a sin to marry a girl on that income. I do not mean at all that the possibilities of life for him are wrapped up in getting married, but if he con-

vinces himself that that is beyond his reach, he is paralyzed and numbed at the outset.'

The moisture broke out on Orlando's forehead and down his back.

- 'Do you mean to give away your money, and advise me to remit the mine-dues?'
- 'Would you not take me on those terms?' Tita asked, with a woman's mischievous impulse to tease.

Orlando looked at her quite seriously.

- 'I would take you,' he said, 'on anything that would keep you from actual starvation; but £125 a year would hardly provide the two of us with enough bread.'
- 'You are wrong there, as you must know, if you think. You have never been obliged to live on bread, and you say before you went back to the office you had only the uncertain income from the mine.'
- 'I would not have you live under such hard conditions as I did, and I believe I always spent at the rate of more than £125 a year. Could you live in a cottage, scour and scrub from morning to night, fare roughly at the best, and think twice before you put on your winter petticoat?'
- 'Oh, don't!' said Tita; 'you make one's teeth chatter to listen to you.'
- 'And you would not be able to afford a good fire except while you were at your cooking or washing.'
- 'Stop, Orlando, or I will put my hands on my ears. The preacher is not your rôle, but mine. You will find if you drop in at the Jenkins' that people who live in a cottage can afford an excellent fire, sometimes two, for the best managers among them use a sitting-room as an agreeable retreat from the kitchen, where the hardest work is done. They are well fed and warmly clad, and, remember, twenty-five shillings a week is a very high rate of wages for this district. In our argument we start with twice that. The

necessaries of life are cheap-everyone knows that-and I class a wife and children, and lodgings and food and clothes, all under the head of necessaries. Of course, the clerk has unhappily a margin of necessities from which the labourer and fisherman are free. A rather better house, with higher rates and taxes, education for his children, more pretentious clothes, keeping up appearances—these are all necessaries of life to the lower middle classes. But they can still be I have not worked it out yet as to whether the maidof-all-work would turn the balance, but the wise young housekeeper will see that the gain of keeping a servant is still too hypothetical to need to enter into the calculation. To be happy there must be something saved to meet old age and possible doctor's bills. But with self-denial and industry and thrift it can be done, and it seems to me a wholesomer ideal of life for the poor man than to stand with a flower in his buttonhole and a cigarette between his teeth, shivering on the brink of matrimony till he is forty, while the girl he should have married drifts out of his life; perhaps I should say the girls, for I am not sure that it matters which it is—any one out of half a dozen.'

- 'Oh, Tita! this sneer from you?'
- 'It is no sneer. To some, one; to the many, one of some.'
- 'I rather respect the poor fellow in a bank,' said Orlando, 'who "shivers" through the tentative impulses of his youth, and lives his life of coldness and safety. You could throw a light of rose-colour over the privations and anxieties of poverty for the man who loved you. You are so brave and clever and interesting, one feels one could never know want or dulness with you; but you are one in a thousand.'
- 'Only to you! and you need not take me as a type. The great beauty, the heiress, the woman who can make a fortune for herself, is a woman in a thousand; but to be

thrifty, to be considerate, to look steadily on the bright side of life, "plain living and high thinking," are within the reach of all.'

'Are you going to sacrifice all the comforts of your position, lay aside even the aims of your art, to demonstrate this? I am ready, if you will it so. With you I shall be happy, which is more than I deserve. In fact, a man who has been such a knave and fool as I have has no right to be happy.'

'Are you sure you will be so very happy?' Tita asked anxiously. 'Remember, you will be at your work all day, and when it is not hard it will be uninteresting. And you may come home to find mine has been both, and left me tired and cross. Do you think you could be happy all the same?'

She leaned towards him as she asked this question, and her gray eyes met his steadfastly.

Every fibre in him rose to meet the challenge in them. His hands trembled with emotion as they closed on hers, and he drew her to him.

'I am sure. To be with you is life.'

He released her, and lay back, experiencing delicious magnetic thrills at her slightest movement, and realizing that the forces of Nature had been developing since the world began for this thing. The breeze which just lifted the stray golden threads of her hair had been circling round the world since it played over sinless Eden. Light and warmth were reflected for him from her eyes in love divine. It was not the first time he had loved, we know; he had loved and been disappointed, he had loved and been deceived. But here was love which was self-sufficient, incapable of distrust. She might pain him; but deceive or disappoint him, never. If she chose to take him to a cave in a wilderness, 'the desert were a paradise if she were there.'

She let him give himself up to the sublimity of the idea, and took and returned his kisses with a tender smile.

'I am afraid,' she said at last, 'what I really want you to do may not be so easy as shifting off our superfluous wealth, and retiring to a cottage, where the woodbine and roses make a sweet obscurity year in, year out. There is another class to be helped.'

'What can she have to propose more?' thought Orlando, breathless: 'a good example of life to the itinerant poor?'

'The struggles and repressions of a class above that of the clerk have often struck me as more pathetic, because less obvious and remediable than actual want and pain. The man who has started out in life with lofty ambitions and aims, perhaps finds the path of talent in art or letters a thorny one. His success is partial, or he finds himself weighted down with responsibilities and cares that his noble nature owns as a first charge on all his resources. "I will never bring home a wife to live with my mother," he says; "and my means will not admit of two homes. My beloved must change, or wait, or die." I used to think when I heard people say that it was natural a man should leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, that it was the reverse of natural. To leave the sweet ties which have grown with our growth, and fly away gladly into the unknown with a veiled stranger, seemed to me unnatural in the extreme. But now I know better. How, you will say, can we two help in such cases as I am imagining? By proving that happiness is not a luxury. Do you remember how Sir Walter Besant ends "The Monks of Thelema"? Don't start, dearest. going to try to establish a home for the unsuccessful and necessitous. Sir Walter smooths the path of two young people there who had not goodness or self-reliance enough to face a life of hardness and endeavour. To me that is It may happen that Providence occasionally

sweeps the crossings for us, though, as a fact, I never knew a single instance; but as a foundation for mutual happiness, a love which is prepared for work and self-denial must be better than a wave of luck, which a change in the wind may drive from us again. Mr. Marion Crawfordyou see I am taking arms against a mighty host - makes one of his characters say that Love will not harness the horses to the carriage; but there is much that is quite as definite to be said on the other side. The gain is different. but not a bit less real. What lamp, however richly shaded, ever glowed with the light that shines from the eves of those who love us? And what Liberty cushion, and they are soft, ever thrilled us like the pressure of arms we love? You will object that one could not do one's sewing by the light of those eyes, and sewing is always understood to be a staple commodity with those who marry for love; and that the pressure of those arms, even if they had not to be bread-winning themselves, would much hinder the said sewing. But even poor people do not always have to toil and spin. There come moments when mutual understanding and sympathy are vital. Can we, you and I, live so as to prove that there is a good, independent of, and superior to, material good?'

- 'Live out the gospel you preached in "Pro Bono Publico"?' suggested Orlando.
- 'Yes. Your income and the interest on the money Uncle George gave me would amount to about £250 a year. If for a few years we lived on that, and comfortably and respectably, I think we should have demonstrated a great possibility.'
  - 'I think so, too,' said Orlando.
- 'I believe you will be surprised to find how possible it is. You will have to keep steadily at your work, and practise a reasonable amount of economy and moderation; and I shall have to work and put my best intelligence into the



#### LOVE AND ART

management of our house. Scores of people do it quietly, and of necessity. I want to do it as a precedent. Society has come to have so many needs, and to believe its needs so imperative, a sweet and simple life will have all the charm of novelty. "Nothing is more needed than the rejuvenescence of the commonplace." Let that be our I know something of economy, as you will remember, and I am not afraid but that I shall make an excellent housekeeper for a poor man, and learn many practical lessons of phliosophy. Then, by-and-by, when a little leisure comes in our life, I will tell the world how two people married and were happy, though poor. Does not someone say, "What we feel in sadness we tell in song"? I do not mean that we shall be sad,' she added, slipping her fingers around his arm, and encouraging him with her sustaining glance. 'What we learn in practice we will tell in prose. So you will, instead of sacrificing me, enable me at last to lead a perfect life of Love and Art.'

- 'It is a splendid destiny, darling! What a glorious thought that the follies, sins, mistakes, misfortunes of life have not been able to thwart it!'
- 'I should rejoice in it more, perhaps,' she said sadly, 'if the coincidence had not been so completely on one side.'
- 'How about the poplar-tree,' he suggested. 'And remember, while I have been growing haggard and gray in iniquity and trouble, you have remained a beautiful girl.'
- 'How can you venture on such an outrageous statement in face of the broad daylight staring down on my wrinkles?'
- 'I do not see them,' he said, looking straight into her eyes; 'but if you have any I will wear them out with kisses.'

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'But how will you wear them out of my heart?' she demanded gravely.

'I am afraid, darling, it is not in my power to do that. I would rather die than make you unhappy. But the shadow over my life must be that the past is hopeless. But the future is ours; and it may have great possibilities for us. We are still young, strong, and happy in each other's love. Few people of our age can have had such opportunities for judging the worth of the accidental attributes of life. I am willing to try the experiment you propose. It is not so much your arguments which convince me, though you seem to make it plain that one wants very little to be happy. It is the sweetness, the vital necessity of your smiles and caresses. I might think that you blindfolded my reason with them, but for the facts behind, all that you have suffered and done and proved. The past makes you irrefutable.'

THE END.



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